

TOM FRANK ON THE CULTURAL STUDIES WARS

May 27-June 9, 1996

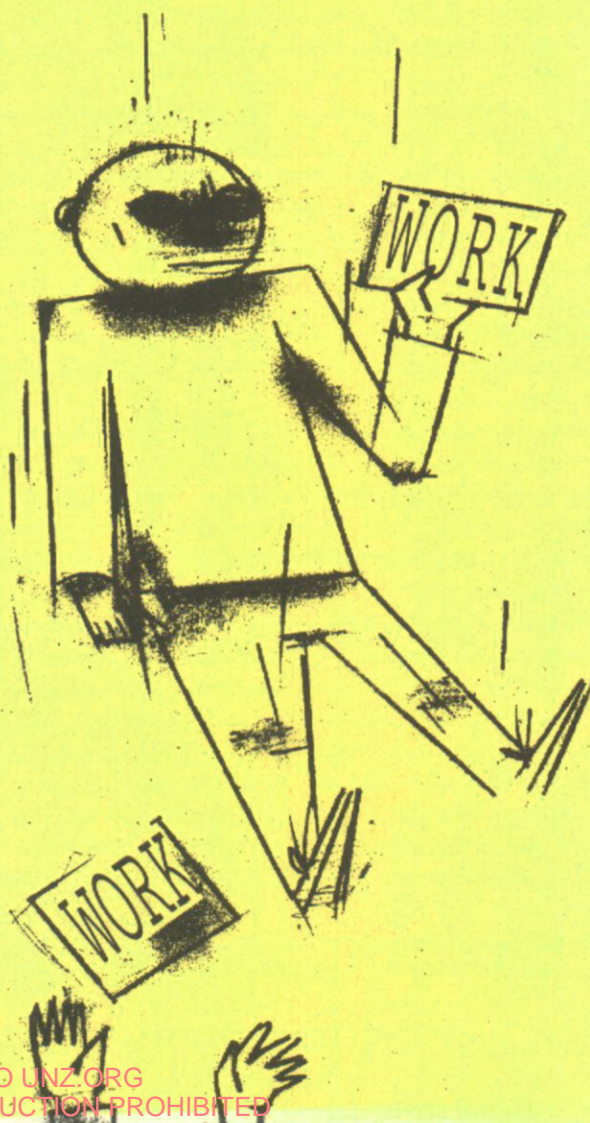
IN THESE TIMES

WAGELESS in Wisconsin

Governor Tommy
Thompson's welfare
"reforms" hinge on
low-wage jobs
that don't exist.

Katherine
Sciacchitano
reports

\$2.50/CANADA \$3.00



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EDITORIAL

REAL PUBLIC ACCESS

Like water falling from the skies, the airwaves belong to the people, or so the law says. But at least since the National Broadcasting Co. (NBC) was formed in 1926, radio and, later, television have been dominated by large corporations licensed by the federal government to sell airtime for their own profit. One result has been the dumbing down of public discourse. Another, as using the airwaves to buy access to the public has grown apace, has been the corruption of our political system.

Democratic politics, and the vigorous civil society on which any true democracy is based, have been the special victims of commercial control of our most intrusive media. When it costs \$20 million to run a failed primary campaign for president or U.S. senator, and \$1 million, or more, to get elected to Congress, few who are not servants of the rich or the super-rich can participate effectively in the political life of the nation.

So it is no wonder that people are increasingly cynical about politics, or that they distrust politicians and discount their campaign promises to aid working people. Nor is it surprising that campaign reform has become a centerpiece of left concern.

And it's also unsurprising that would-be reformers of our political system have concentrated on the impact of money on political campaigns, and on the performance in office of politicians who sell themselves for big bucks. Some of our best political figures, like Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-MN), initially refused contributions of more than \$100, so that they could contrast themselves to those beholden to large contributors. But despite the best of intentions, this approach can work only under very unusual circumstances. For a good guy to refuse large contributions only hands the advantage over to the bad guys who get more money than they need. It's a useful gesture that makes an important point, but as long as it costs a small fortune to get exposure in the media, the \$100 limit will accomplish little. Even if it were imposed by law, there are enough ways around such a ban, including the use of personal fortunes, to render it ineffective.

One alternative, the most obvious, is full public financing of all federal election campaigns. But even though the amount of money involved would be a pittance compared to other budget items, public financing can too easily be attacked as just another manifestation of government intervention and as one more tax on an already tax-sensitive public.

A second alternative is for the people to take back their airwaves, at least for use in elections to Congress and for president. At no cost to the public, free airtime for all qualified candidates could, and should, be made a requirement for all radio and television licenses. This would allow all candidates equal access to the electorate if they could amass a threshold level of popular support.

This is an idea whose time has come. And strangely it has implicitly been acknowledged by broadcasters themselves. Earlier this month, ABC joined its rivals at NBC and CBS in accepting a challenge from Fox TV network owner Rupert Murdoch to provide one hour of free airtime to the major presidential candidates in October, along with a series of one-minute spots from both candidates for position statements. This concession was made as a result of a crusade mounted by former *Washington Post* correspondent Paul Taylor in February. Of course, the embrace of Taylor's proposal may well be designed to pacify critics and head off more meaningful access to a wider range of candidates at earlier stages in the electoral process—in much the same way, for example, that major breweries run public-service spots to appease groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving. But even so, the networks' move is still an encouraging precedent. In the long fight to reclaim our democracy, it should inspire others to seize the initiative in pushing for free public access to all licensed broadcasters. ◀

WELCOME, ALTON MILLER

We are extremely pleased to announce that Alton Miller is *In These Times'* new culture editor. Miller, who was Chicago Mayor Harold Washington's press secretary, 1985-87, has a strong background in the arts and politics. He was managing director of the Washington Ballet, 1978-83, general director of the Chicago City Ballet, 1983-84, and before that a drama critic for the *Washington Calendar Magazine* and the *Washington Star*. He has also been a political consultant and speechwriter for Philadelphia Mayor W. Wilson Goode, 1989-90, and communications director for Carol Moseley-Braun's Senate primary campaign, 1991-92. Currently, he is teaching courses on politics and the media and on news interviewing at Columbia College in Chicago, and he serves as a consultant to the UAW Caterpillar strikers in Illinois.

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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Number 14

Wageless in Wisconsin

How Tommy Thompson's assault on the welfare state is hanging low-wage workers out to dry.

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Cultural clash

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LETTERS

Perpetrating confusion

Many have pointed out that during the Cold War the United States and the Soviet Union cooperated in perpetuating the lie that the Communist states were socialist. The Communists wanted to legitimize their rule and to portray themselves as a beacon of hope to Third World revolutionaries; the United States sought to discredit any movement toward democratic control of the economy (either domestically or abroad) by holding up these totalitarian regimes as the inevitable outcome of socialism.

In his review of Katherine Verdery's *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*, Joel Robbins embraces the Cold War lie (which Verdery seems to endorse as well). The descriptions of economic life in the article seem to be accurate analyses of the dynamics at work in the Communist bloc, and yet the word "Communism" does not

appear even once. The word "socialism" and its variants, however, are repeated more than two dozen times. A casual reader would be left in the dark about social democracy, the democratic form of socialism present in varying degrees in the West (most dramatically, in Sweden).

Not having read Verdery's book, I can't say whether the equation of communism with socialism—and the failure to discuss social democracy—is Verdery's error or Robbins'.

Bert Meisel
Baltimore

Risky business

Your April 29 editorial, "How to Save Social Security," argues for investing the proceeds from Social Security taxes in the stock market and for taking Social Security off the budget books.

Given a choice between Congress and "the market" to guarantee Social Security and Medicare payments for future generations, I'll take Congress. Beneficiaries and future beneficiaries alike can influence Congress; they can only watch the market.

As a co-creator of the Domini 400 Social Index, I've had more reason than many to look at market cycles. Even the most conservative investment strategy involves risk. If you "buy the market" as large pension funds do through index funds, you tie your performance to what the market does. And that can be up or down.

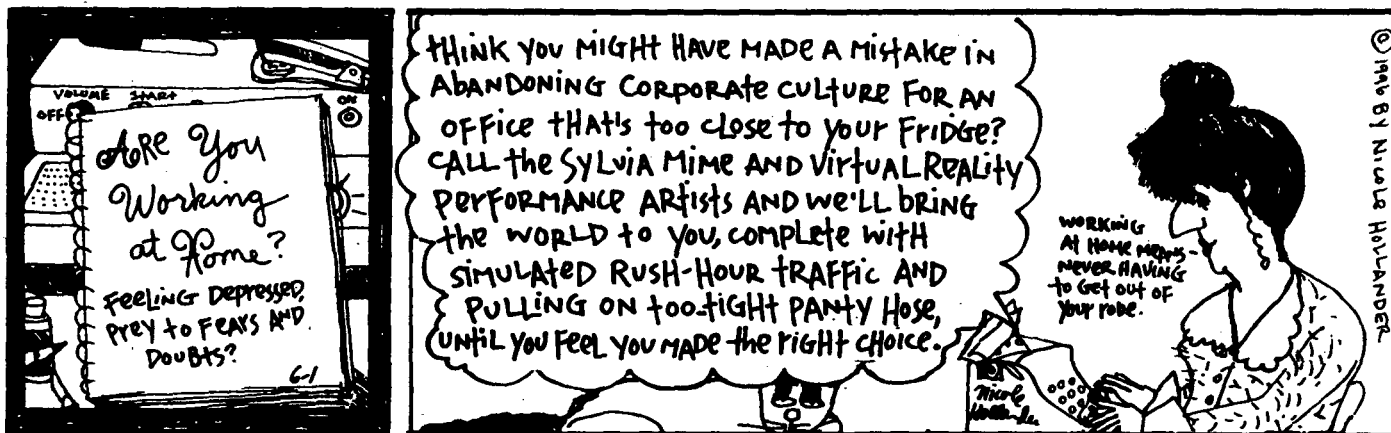
Popular wisdom has it that investing in stocks over the long term is a winning proposition. It may be, but only if you pick the right stocks or investment vehicles and you don't buy at the top of the market or have to cash out during a bear market. After the great crash, 25 years passed before the Dow regained its 1929 level.

While I would strongly support using part of the Social Security fund surplus for "socially desirable investment," the Labor Department has pulled down the trial balloons it floated in this area. Egged on by the *Wall Street Journal*, Rep. James Saxton (R-NJ) has introduced a "pension fund preservation" bill that would do away with what little social investing the funds now do.

Saxton's heinous efforts are taking place in public. In a legislative fight, we can try to beat him and, if we lose,

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander





lobby for a veto. But what if he only had to convince a "non-political" board running Social Security and Medicare trust funds? Experience with lobbying pension fund trustees on issues such as South Africa and alternative investments argues strongly for keeping policy-making where it can be influenced democratically. Isn't one Alan Greenspan more than enough?

And, the semi-annual debates on Social Security and Medicare are good for the country. In what other context can we raise social equity issues and get a hearing? Some day we may elect politicians bent on exposing the budget-balancers as blustering little men behind big curtains. But we certainly won't if we give away the means to pull down the curtain and keep it down.

Peter D. Kinder
Cambridge, Mass.

Creeping fascism

I have always thought that the assignment of surplus value only to private interests was the exclusive characteristic of a fascist state. So your suggestion of investing Social Security funds in the stock market sounds very fishy.

Whose side are you on?

Robert Sommer
New York City

Market socialism

Shame on you for buying the pitch for investing Social Security funds in the stock market. Yes, stocks have out-performed Treasury bonds—over

the long, long term. But, for example, investors unlucky enough to commit their fortunes to Wall Street just before the 1929 crash didn't even break even for decades. And some think that today's surging market mirrors (or outdoes) the excesses of the Roaring Twenties.

Let's face it, Wall Streeters touting Social Security investment in the market have the same motive that other privatizers have—they want to get their mitts on the commissions trading those billions in government money would bring them. Why some labor folks and *In These Times* want to go along with this scheme beats me!

And must we accept the fiction that Social Security monies are held in a "trust fund"? It's not really so—witness the complaints about the "raiding" of the fund (which only replaces government bonds with equally gilt-edged IOUs). The whole idea was invented to sell the idea to a conservative Congress in the '30s. They bought it, not least because of its regressive financing.

Why shouldn't the United States, like many other nations, pay for social programs out of general revenues? Then, political debate would focus less on "crises" and more on how (or whether) the benefits will be paid for.

John Glasel
Tenafly, N.J.

Editor's note: We generally agree with Peter Kinder's preference for Congress over unelected regulators. The problem is the disappearance of the surplus, which is now being used to mask the extent of the deficit instead of accumulating outside the stream of general

revenues and expenditures. Prudently investing the surplus in the private market would provide a reserve that could be paid out without raising taxes. If the semi-annual debates on Social Security and Medicare were real debates about social policy rather than scare tactics designed to cut benefits, they might be healthy. The current debates are simply exercises in demagoguery.

We also agree with John Glasel that the United States should pay for social programs out of general revenues. If it did it would immediately become clear that we are paying too much in Social Security taxes, much of which are now being used to pay for other things. But such a change is not about to happen. And since we do have an annual surplus, it should be protected so that it can be used for the purpose for which it is ostensibly collected.

Robert Sommer may remember that fascist states are often strong practitioners of government ownership. This was especially so of Nazi Germany.

Roseanne revised

It seems Linda DeLibero is not a Roseanne fan, and nine years is a lot of shows, so she must have missed the ones that dealt openly and effectively with "domestic violence, the threat of permanent joblessness, fear of growing old." (See "My Roseanne problem—and ours," April 29.) These and other "darker aspects of low-income ... life" are not "tellingly absent." I suggest that DeLibero check out the reruns.

The Honeymooners DeLibero so admires is a classic masterpiece of a series, and for its day and in its short run it confronted many issues; Roseanne in its long run through an issue-oriented decade confronted far more.

Both series caught the imagination of Americans across class lines because they were funny, emotional (is this what DeLibero means by "scary"?) and, yes, because they dealt with family values.

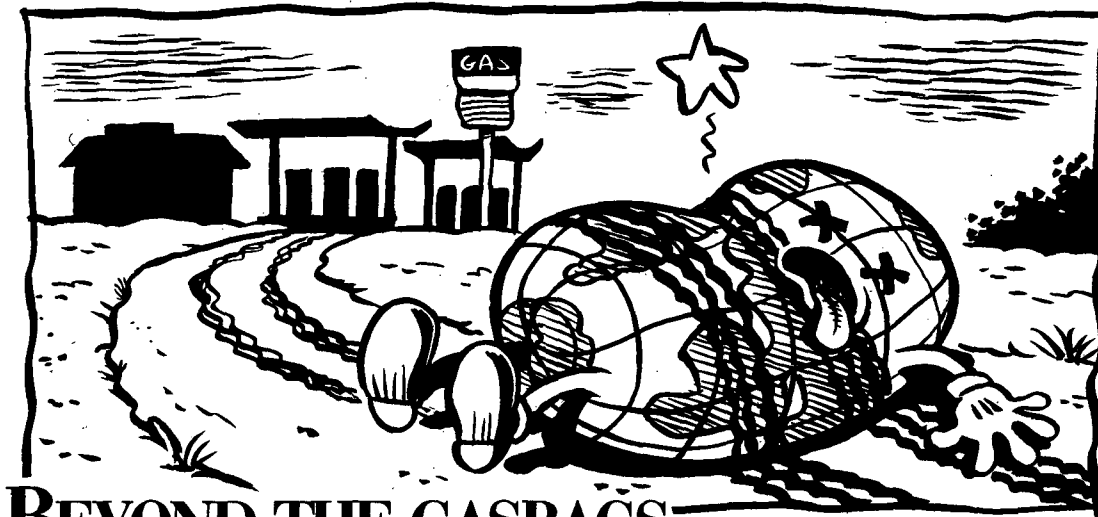
Gordon Quinn
Chicago

INSHORT

unlike any in human history. Last fall, in the midst of the hottest year on record, the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change declared that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases generated by humans are exacerbating the trend. As temperatures and ocean levels rise over the next century, some researchers warn, the planet may face grim consequences, from the flooding of some 70 million people around the world to the gradual spread of tropical diseases such as malaria, which could expand from 270 million to 350 million cases per year.

But the realpolitik of Washington, D.C., hasn't yet acknowledged the news. Instead, on *Face the Nation* Newt Gingrich vowed to fight for a gas tax break for Americans in

time for their Memorial Day weekend driving trips. In 1993, Clinton introduced a comprehensive energy plan that aimed, in part, to reduce U.S. emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. Among other measures, the bill



BEYOND THE GASBAGS

In calling for the repeal of the 1993 federal gasoline tax, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole has found an ideal campaign issue: It's simple, trivial and suburban. President Clinton likes the idea enough that he has promised to approve it, even though his administration twisted the arms of congressional

Democrats to pass this tax in the first place. But this jousting match serves mainly to show how detached campaign politics remain from environmental reality.

Since 1993, scientists have reached a broad consensus that the earth has entered a period of global warming

The odor of influence

ON MAY 10, WMX, FORMERLY WASTE MANAGEMENT, WAS INDUCTED INTO THE "Influence-Peddling Hall of Shame." There it will join RJR Nabisco, Philip Morris and Dow Chemical, which have garnered similar recognition from INFACIT. The Boston-based group, which organized a worldwide boycott against Nestlé and GE, established the Hall of Shame to expose how corporations manipulate public policy at the expense of human health and the public good.

For example, over the past 15 years WMX, the world's largest waste company, has been fined more than \$50 million for criminal and civil violations. Between 1980 and 1990, the company was cited for about 600 violations of U.S. environmental regulations. And between 1978 and 1991, 225 criminal and civil actions were filed against the company. For these misdeeds, WMX has been forced to pay \$28 million for criminal acts and \$45 million for violating civil environmental laws. And that doesn't count the \$11.6 million fine WMX paid in 1992 for six felony violations in what the Justice Department characterized as "the largest environmental crimes case ever." How does such a company stay in business? It employs 22 registered lobbyists in Washington, and has more than 35 former government officials—including seven from the EPA—in its executive suites. —Joel Bleifuss



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APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

Animal houses 8.7

There are some facts, courtesy of the *New York Times*, that are guaranteed to spice up the conversation at the next frat mixer: Fraternities spend \$30 million a year, approximately a third of their budgets, to pay lia-

these cases—even though many involve serious and violent offenses—never go beyond campus judicial systems, which ensure, as the *Times* notes, that “thousands of criminal offenses virtually disappear each academic year.”

Major dads 3.2

A political report from Lynn Sweet of the *Chicago Sun-Times* this May began with a startling announcement: “Vice President Al Gore visits Chicago today to make a pitch for dads to spend time with their children and to have lunch with donors who are contributing \$100,000 to the Democratic convention host committee.” Next, we presume, Gore will ask moms to meet with oil industry lobbyists—while baking pies for the PTA.

Fatal flaws 4.3

When asked on a recent David Frost PBS special if he had any character flaws, Ross Perot couldn't really think of any off the bat, telling Frost “I will stand on principle and fight for what I believe in.

And that's a flaw.” When Frost reminded him that this wasn't really a flaw, Perot thought for a moment, then suggested it was “probably a flaw” that upon entering politics four years ago he “was just shocked at the total absence of any kind of ethics.”

Perot, of course, is not the only politician without any flaws to speak of. After New York City Councilwoman Julia Harrison compared Asian immigrants in Flushing to “smugglers, thieves, and paupers,” Asian-American protesters demanded an apology. Harrison's response? As *Newsday* noted, she indignantly declared herself to be “a fair, honest, hard-working outspoken individual,” and suggested that it was unfortunate that some happened to be offended by her remarks.

The measure of a man 5.2

There's no need to get out the ruler—it was all a mistake. A correction in the May 12 *New York Times* “Week in Review” section noted that “Because of an editing error, an article last Sunday about sperm count misstated the average sperm count of men in Los Angeles. It is 72.7 million per milliliter, not per millimeter.”

vehicles and pickup trucks, the U.S. fuel efficiency average has slipped. And it promises to fall further with speed limits rising up to 75 miles per hour in many Western states. The Sierra Club and others have argued that new CAFE standards of 45 mpg for cars and 34 mpg for light trucks would make a bold strike against global warming. But Democratic and Republican Congresses alike have rebuffed efforts to raise the standards. And Clinton has shown no interest in raising the issue.

Still, compared to presidential opponent Bob Dole, Clinton manages to look principled. In his fight to repeal the 1993 gas tax, Dole has actually opposed an amendment requiring oil companies to pass the 4.3-cents-per-gallon savings to consumers. As Philip Verleger, an economist at Charles River Associates, told the *Washington Post*: “The Republican-sponsored solution to the current fuels problem ... is nothing more and nothing less than a refiners' benefit bill. It will transfer upwards of \$3 billion from the U.S. Treasury to the pockets of refiners and gasoline marketers.” American voters will not be the ones laughing all the way to the pump.

—Will Nixon

THE DIANNA FILES

After spending five weeks stationed across the street from the White House, Sister Dianna Ortiz ended her silent vigil to pressure the Clinton administration into making public all documents relating to human rights abuses in Guatemala, including her 1989 abduction, rape and torture. Ortiz called off the vigil May 6, shortly after receiving a congressional letter to the president requesting the release of the documents.

The State Department released 92 percent of its 6,350 “relevant documents” on May 3, but this partial compliance has not silenced Ortiz. The

called for a tax on fossil fuel sources of carbon, particularly coal.

Congress killed the bill, passing the gas tax as a compromise, and the administration has approached energy policy timidly ever since. Later that year, for example, it presented a climate action plan of voluntary measures for industry but excluded automobile manufacturers, a glaring omission considering that cars and trucks produce one-quarter of all carbon emissions. The

administration now admits that the United States won't reach Clinton's emissions goal by 2000.

For years, environmentalists have called upon Congress to renew the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards passed in 1973. As one of the best environmental laws in history, these standards steadily pushed cars to 27.5 mpg by 1988. But as many Americans have switched from cars to minivans, sport utility

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bility costs. And what kind of liability claims might they face? Well, according to the *Times*, “an insurance analysis of more than 900 claims against fraternities in a six-year period reveals that one out of four resulted from a death, paralysis or a serious injury.” Unlike the much-maligned boyz ‘n’ the hood, the brothers ‘n’ the frat houses don't generally make headlines for their crimes; the bulk of

newly released records, she says, shed no light on the identity of one of the key figures in her ordeal—a man her torturers called “Alejandro.” The department has retained 503 documents, citing the federal Privacy Act and, not surprisingly, “national security reasons.” Meanwhile, Defense and intelligence documents have not been released, and the Intelligence Oversight Board charged with investigating the matter has not yet issued its report.

Ortiz’s ordeal began in November 1989, when she was kidnapped from the backyard of a religious retreat and taken to a clandestine prison. There she was interrogated, tortured and raped. Some hours later, “Alejandro” appeared—a light-skinned man who cursed in American English and spoke in heavily accented Spanish. He shouted at Ortiz’s torturers that she was a North American nun, that her disappearance had become public, and ordered them to stop. After putting her into his jeep, Alejandro told Ortiz he was going to take her to a friend at the American Embassy who would help her leave the country. He also told her that he was working to liberate the Guatemalans from communism and that she should forgive her torturers, claiming that they had confused her with someone else. Then he

threatened her in English to remember a videotape and photographs her torturers had taken of her.

Not knowing what to believe, she jumped out of his jeep when it was stopped in traffic and ran, eventually finding help and making her way back to the United States a few days later.

Since her return, Ortiz has been campaigning to learn the identity of her torturers and of “Alejandro,” whom the torturers referred to as their boss. At least one of the State Department documents has shown why her crusade has been so difficult—the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala seems to have been more interested in making Ortiz’s story out to be a hoax than in finding out about “Alejandro” or her torturers.

An early November 1989 cable sent under U.S. Ambassador Thomas Stroock’s name used minor inconsistencies in the story as told by different persons around Ortiz to cast doubt on her credibility. It claimed that Ortiz “hardly speaks Spanish,” implying that she could not have understood what her captors had said. Yet Ortiz was brought up in a bilingual home in New Mexico and spoke Spanish to the Mayan children she had taught during her stay in Guatemala. The cable also questioned Ortiz’s ability to escape from “a moving car, running at high

speed,” given the condition she claimed to be in. But, of course, Ortiz had said that she jumped out of Alejandro’s jeep when it was stopped in traffic.

Even seven years after Stroock’s attempt to discredit Ortiz’s story, the so-called liberal media seems content to trade in many of the same kind of inaccuracies. On a May 6 *Nightline* broadcast, Cokie Roberts tried to put words in Ortiz’s mouth, stating several times that Ortiz had charged that an “American official” had been involved in her abduction. Ortiz, however, said the man was a “North American” who claimed to have a friend at the embassy; she had not characterized him as “an American official.” Roberts seemed to treat Ortiz’s story with disbelief, even when National Security Council official Nancy Soderberg, who was also interviewed on the program, said that the Clinton administration has “no reason not to believe her.”

A *Washington Post* story the following day carried the headline “U.S. Documents Confirm Skepticism on Nun’s Rape.” The story quoted Ambassador Stroock without comment or analysis. Turning to “an independent source who had reviewed the documents,” *Post* reporter R. Jeffrey Smith wrote that one suspicious gap in the released documents—of two-and-a-half completely redacted pages following shortly after a reference to “the ‘North American’ named by Ortiz”—contained “nothing that refers to or describes Alejandro.” The *Post* report made no mention of the 503 other pages withheld from public release for national security or other reasons.

Will Alejandro’s identity ever be known? Because the case involves a flagrant abuse of human rights, there is probably no paper trail, as there was in Jennifer Harbury’s case. However, if the Justice Department were to interview under oath all U.S. government employees who were in Guatemala in 1989, using the sketch of Alejandro made by the forensic artist in the Unabomber case, someone might recognize him.

—A. Larson

High on the hog

THE MERGER OF TWO MILITARY CONTRACTORS, MARTIN MARIETTA AND Lockheed, into the Lockheed Martin Corp. will result in the “outplacement” of at least 19,000 employees. But not everybody will be hurting. Top executives at the new company asked the Defense Department, which funds the weapons maker, for \$31 million in executive compensation. The department denied \$14.8 million of that claim, but is considering paying the other \$16.2 million. Reps. Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) sent a letter of protest to Defense Secretary William Perry. “Corporate welfare appears to be sacrosanct and thriving as far as the Pentagon is concerned,” they wrote, going on to point out that during the past eight years, 2.2 million Americans have lost their defense-related jobs. And according to the General Accounting Office, the CEOs at the 10 largest defense contractors saw their compensation increase from, on average, \$980,000 in 1989 to a peak of \$3.6 million in 1993. As Rep. Maloney put it: “How can anyone justify the federal government offering CEO compensation that is 187 times the average worker’s wage?” —J.B.



Gender gap revisited

At first glance, one of the most intriguing new developments in the presidential race seems to be the gender gap. Recent front-page stories in the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* heralded poll results showing that the vast majority of women prefer President Bill Clinton over Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole. Soon afterward, nearly every other major newspaper—including the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Washington Post*—joined in, publishing features and op-eds on Dole's woeful levels of support among women voters. Even *USA Today* has weighed in, with a survey asking teens: "Is there a gender gap?"

A better question might have been, "Why does a gender gap still exist?" Exactly eight years ago, several major newspapers ran surprisingly similar stories on their front pages—even quoting the same sources. These stories, too, appeared after poll results revealed that women preferred Democrat Michael Dukakis over George Bush by a whopping 28 points.

The 1988 stories also arrived at many of the same conclusions as the more recent gender gap stories: In order to win, the GOP candidate will have to project a more women-friendly image in the media and tailor his message to female voters. Perhaps if reporters wrote on the root causes of the gender gap more than every four to eight years, their analysis would be more creative, and female voters would not have to wait for a presidential election to have their concerns addressed.

Lock the rascals up

Unhappy with critical press coverage, some New York Republicans have found an innovative way to fight back against the liberal media: arrest the reporters. In late April, Wayne Barrett of the *Village Voice* and Andrea Bernstein of the *New York Observer* were arrested at a state Republican party fundraiser. Hotel security, at the request of GOP officials, arrested the reporters as they loitered around the Waldorf Astoria, trying to determine which wealthy GOP donors were inside currying favor with the administration. (In a *Times* story about the episode, Gov. George Pataki's spokesperson, Zenia Muchia, justified the arrests by attacking the *Voice* and the *Observer*. "I would hardly call them bastions of journalism," she said.)

It's not just Pataki's people who are cracking down on reporters, however. Two weeks ago, New York City's newly

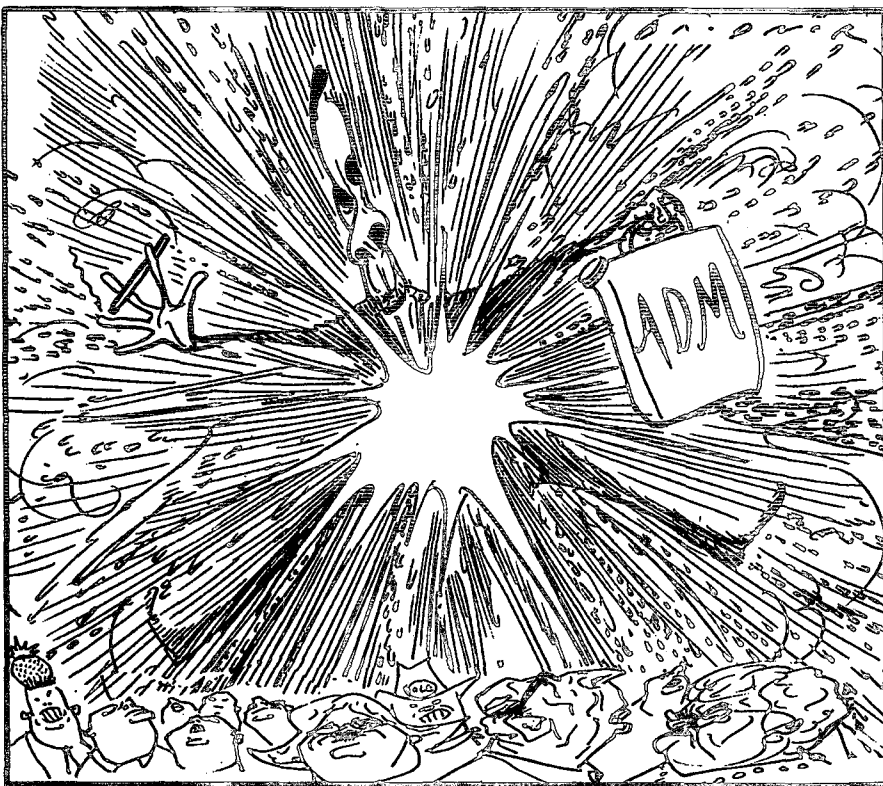
appointed police commissioner, Howard Safir, barred a *Daily News* reporter from entering a press briefing. The commissioner proclaimed his action was justified because the reporter, John Marzulli, had criticized him in print, quoting another police official who called him a "lightweight."

Error, schmerror

Sometimes, newspapers' corrections boxes provide the best guide to the news. In its May 8 issue, *The Hill*—a Capitol Hill weekly—apologized for misquoting John Feerhery, spokesman for Majority Whip Tom Delay (R-TX): "His statement should have read, 'Over the next couple of months, you're going to see Republicans pulling on the rope a lot harder to be more on the offensive,' not 'to be more offensive.'" Presumably Gingrich's Congress would be hard-pressed to think of ways to be more offensive.

TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner



For Convention finale Dole's dependency on ADM ethanol and Philip Morris tobacco causes him to spontaneously combust, creating spectacular fireworks display.



THE PEPSI CHALLENGE

Wayne Calloway, the retiring PepsiCo chairman, had heard enough. At the May 1 shareholders meeting, Calloway—who, along with other company executives, thought they had finessed the Burma situation—decided he'd taken enough heat from angry investors and human rights advocates about the snack food giant's investment in the out-of-the-way Southeast Asian country ruled by a brutal military junta.

A week before the stockholders meeting at the company's Westchester, N.Y., compound, PepsiCo officials let the word out that the company was selling its stake in a Burma bottling plant to U Thein Thun, a Burmese businessman with strong ties to the junta. Instead, PepsiCo created a five-year franchise agreement with Thein Thun—which still allows Pepsi to sell its syrup and corporate logo in Burma.

"We care about public opinion," Calloway announced. "We have decided to divest our stake in that business.

That puts us in the same position as other companies whose products are available in the country."

But is this real divestment? The Burma bottling plant's operation will remain virtually unchanged. Critics say that this is nothing more than a public relations stunt to fool the student boycotters whose campaign has recently started to cost PepsiCo money in lost contracts at college campuses.

At Harvard University, Pepsi lost out to Coke on a five-year \$1 million contract after student protests against Pepsi. At Stanford University, 2,000 students signed petitions to keep Taco

Bell, a PepsiCo subsidiary, outside their borders. On May 3, students at Colgate University got the student food service, run by the Marriott Co., to switch from Pepsi to Coke.

"We're in for the long struggle," says Zar Ni, organizer of the Free Burma Coalition, which is now active on 120 high school and college campuses. "As long as they make a penny, we'll fight." Plans include a three-day hunger strike starting October 4.

On campus, Pepsi has become an easy target. "Pepsi is really vulnerable," Zar Ni admits. "They do such a good job of marketing on campus—and that backfires."

For example, boycott organizers have made sporting use of the company's "Pepsi Stuff" campaign, which offers goodies like black leather jackets, mountain bikes, beach chairs and CD cases. For their part, boycotters have touted their own unofficial prizes, offering lucky Pepsi consumers their own death squad, air force or enslaved population.

The boycott movement has made headway off campus as well. State and local governments are breaking ties with PepsiCo and other companies that

do business in Burma. Local divestment laws have passed in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley and Ann Arbor, Mich. Bills are pending in New York City and Massachusetts. Congress will soon debate a Burma sanctions bill.

PepsiCo's withdrawal from Burma—however sincere—is likely to have a more symbolic than economic impact. Companies involved in multi-million-dollar development deals with the Burmese government, such as oil giants Unocal and Texaco, will prove more intractable. And campus protesters are unlikely to change that.

—Rob Nixon

POLL SHARKS

With less than a month to go before Russians hit the polls to elect a new president, supposedly scientific opinion surveys differ drastically over who is ahead, leading some observers to wonder whether the public is being systematically misinformed.

Last winter, surveys showed Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov well ahead of President Boris Yeltsin, with enormous strength in Russia's economically blighted industrial hinterland. But recent opinion polls, widely hyped by the Russian media, show Yeltsin overtaking and surpassing his opponent.

A late April survey done by the RAMIR agency, part of the Gallup group, found Yeltsin on top with 29 percent of committed voters, compared with Zyuganov's 27 percent. Another poll, taken by the Public Opinion Foundation and presented by Russian state TV in early May, had Yeltsin ahead with 26.5 to Zyuganov's 25.2 percent. Yet another, released May 6 by the authoritative All-Russia Center for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM), showed Zyuganov hanging on to a marginal lead, with 27 to Yeltsin's 21 percent. Most polls have a margin of error of 3 or 4 percent, which would put the contenders—according to these surveys, at least—running neck-and-neck.

These results paint a useful portrait

Fed finks

THE FEDERAL RESERVE REFORM ACT OF 1977 INSTRUCTS THE FED "TO PROMOTE effectively the goals of maximum employment, stable prices and moderate long-term interest rates." But last fall, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole co-sponsored legislation introduced by Sen. Connie Mack (R-FL) that would abolish the Fed's obligation to promote employment. Mack, who has the support of Fed Chair Alan Greenspan, argues that the current obligation to take jobs into account "is based upon a fundamentally flawed premise—that government is the source of prosperity." With his support of this bill, GOP presidential hopeful Dole seems to have handed Bill Clinton a potent campaign issue. Whether the president is enough of a Democrat to use it is another matter. —J.B.

for the Kremlin, one that shows Yeltsin gradually pulling his disorderly regime together, earning grudging popular approval and moving aggressively to counter the Communist threat. The Moscow media, which is pugnaciously pro-Yeltsin, has given saturation coverage to the president's campaign visits around Russia, unfailingly showing him as healthy, sober and in fighting trim—the very image of a winner.

But one of Russia's oldest and most respected public opinion agencies insists Yeltsin is actually trailing Zyuganov by almost 20 points. The independent Institute for the Sociology of Parliamentarism (ISP), headed by Nugzar Betaneli, released its exhaustive survey of Russian public opinion on May 8, and it found between 43 to 45 percent of committed voters support Zyuganov compared to 25 percent backing Yeltsin.

The ISP is the only polling organization to have accurately forecast the past two parliamentary elections, a track record that puts it in a class of its own. In 1993, most pollsters predicted a landslide victory for the pro-Yeltsin Russia's Choice party and failed to even notice ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who won 24 percent of the vote. In 1995, they turned in a better performance, but still dramatically overstated the public's support for pro-Yeltsin and pro-market reform politicians.

The ISP's latest survey covered the largest sample ever attempted in a Russian opinion study—6,000 respondents in 62 regions of Russia were interviewed. The sample was carefully rated

to reflect population distribution. Betaneli offers several theories to account for the variance between his results and other pollsters. First, most surveys in Russia are conducted by phone, a fundamentally misleading exercise in a country where barely half the population—the richest half—owns a telephone. Second, they may give too much weight to large cities, such as

Moscow, where Yeltsin's support is concentrated. Third, samples are often too small, or not sufficiently representative of Russia's far-flung regions and turbulent social milieu.

Valery Mansurov, a scholar at the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of Sociology, offers still another theory. Most pollsters, he says, have conflicts of interest that Russian law doesn't require them to disclose. "Our institute doesn't do polls, because we can't afford it. Hardly anyone can. All these agencies are being paid by somebody to conduct these surveys," he says.

"I'm not saying their findings are false," he adds. "But we have had to turn down every commission offered to us—and there have been many—because they all want us to cook the results. There is a struggle for power in Russia today that is vicious and unrestrained. Everything is a weapon."

—Fred Weir

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



THE FIRST STONE

THE SLUDGE
HITS THE FAN

By Joel Bleifuss

You know you are doing your job as a journalist when a top official at a federal agency circulates a confidential memo in order to discredit your work.

Last fall, in my October 16 column, "Eat sludge and die," I exposed the Environmental Protection Agency's move to reclassify sewer sludge from a controlled waste to a home garden fertilizer. As I wrote: "Sewer sludge, which was once considered hazardous waste and judged too dangerous to be used on food crops, has been deregulated by the EPA and redefined as an agricultural fertilizer. And fertilizers, as marketable products, are exempt from the laws that govern the disposal of hazardous waste." Within three weeks, PR flacks at the Water Environment Federation (WEF), the sewer industry trade association, had prepared a rebuttal to my story and sent it out to the sewer industry's "Biosolids Spokespersons." (Biosolids is the sanitized name for sewer sludge.) A sewer industry official leaked that rebuttal to John Stauber at *PR Watch*, who passed it on to me.

In a November 2 cover letter to that rebuttal, which included a copy of my story, WEF public information director Nancy Blatt wrote, "You'll see that the article is distorted and completely erroneous." The WEF's apparent goal was to discredit my reporting, and thus prevent my story from being "picked up by mainstream media." (Blatt also said that the information was based on a chapter from Stauber's *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You*, which is not true. Some of the documents I worked with were provided by Stauber, but I didn't read his book until after my article was written.)

Blatt's scientific firepower was provided by Al Rubin, the EPA's senior sludge scientist. Rubin, in a four-page dissection of my article, claimed that my statements "are contrary to all available scientific evidence." He went on to detail "some" of my "most egregious inaccuracies." Let's examine his claims.

Rubin takes issue with my claim that "sludge sold as fertilizer ... cannot be legally landfilled." This, he writes, "is completely false." Table 1 of the EPA's sludge regulation Part 503.23 of the Clean Water Act lists the maxi-

mum pollutant levels for a "surface disposal site" landfill and restricts arsenic to 73 mg/kg (parts per million), chromium to 600 mg/kg and nickel to 420 mg/kg. Rubin's cherished sludge fertilizer limits arsenic to 75 mg/kg, chromium to 3000 mg/kg and nickel to 420 mg/kg. This leaves one to conclude that Rubin hasn't read his own regulations.

Rubin also challenges my assertion that Part 503 "circumvents the 1984 hazardous waste amendments to the Solid Waste Disposal Act, which regulate the dumping of sewage sludge." But he only rebuts this point with a semantic sleight of hand. Rubin points out that the EPA has

tested hundreds of sludge samples and "none has ever demonstrated characteristics of hazardous material." But I did not claim that sewage sludge should be classified as "hazardous material," like PCB-contaminated oil; I said that the new sludge regulation, Part 503, "circumvents" the 1984 amendments to the Solid Waste Disposal Act. That act, as amended, defines sewage sludge, which contains heavy metals and poisonous organic compounds like PCBs, as a solid waste. But the EPA, through Part 503, has redefined sludge as a fertilizer—and thereby shunned responsibility for a national waste problem.

Rubin takes issue with my statement: "The EPA assumed that children can safely absorb 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood." Rubin argues, confusingly, that any exposure to lead in sludge at the limit set by the EPA cannot increase lead levels in blood beyond the "10 benchmark." EPA regulations seem here to take on magical properties—the agency's lead standards for "land-based biosolids," Rubin writes, had been designed "such that a child's or any other individual's lead blood level would not increase over the 10 benchmark if that individual was already at 10 and would not increase to 10 if that individual was below 10." In other words, 10 plus 10 is 10. The EPA claims that this safety level is met with a sludge lead ceiling limit of 300 parts per million. Yet the actual 503 regulation allows for a sludge lead concentration of 840 parts per million—280 percent higher than the EPA's professed safety level.

On the subject of heavy metals, Rubin says that contrary to what I wrote, the "EPA's risk assessment does evaluate multiyear applications of biosolids and does take into account the accumulation of heavy metals to the land." Not according to the EPA's 1989 preamble to the proposed 503 regulation, which points out: "One important limitation of the assessment of the exposure through food is that the projected effects are estimated only for sewage sludge applied in a single year. Multiyear applications were not evaluated, thus the effects would be underestimated for pollutants that remain in the soil for long periods of time without decomposing, especially heavy metals." Further, the EPA's 1993 preamble to the final Part 503 states: "There are uncertain-

ties concerning the long-term behavior of metals in sludge."

Rubin also takes issue with my assertion that the EPA is "ignoring the threat to public safety posed by biologic pathogens that enter sludge through human and animal excrement." He maintains that "the public health and the environment are fully protected" from the 25 pathogens that I list by "a combination of proven treatment technologies, performance standards and land application site controls."

He argues that "the proof in the pudding" is an Ohio Farm Bureau study of about 100 farm families, 47 of whom used sludge fertilizer and the other half conventional fertilizer. The study found, in Rubin's words, "no deleterious effects from biosolids." But a closer look at the research suggests that it's far from authoritative: Of the 47 farm families that treated their farm with sludge, only 13 completed the full three-year study.

Yet the study's own author, Richard Dorn, writing in *Environmental Research*, notes that his findings were based on "low sludge application rates"—and warns that "caution should be exercised in using these data to predict health risks associated with sludges containing higher levels of disease agents and with higher sludge application rates and larger acreages treated per farm than used in this study." He went on to say that "there remain questions about the human health and animal health consequences."

Rubin is correct on one point. I was wrong to claim that Class B sludge fertilizer is "only allowed on above-ground crops such as wheat and corn." (Class B sludge fertilizer, unlike its Class A counterpart, has not been heat-treated to remove biological pathogens.) Rubin points out, correctly, that root crops—like potatoes, beets and carrots—can be grown on land fertilized with Class B sludge as long as there is a 20- to 38-month waiting period between application of the sludge and the harvest of the crop. But Rubin must be dreaming to believe that farmers will wait two or three years to harvest a crop after fertilizing a field. And since there are no regulations governing the use of sludge as fertilizer, farmers are under no compunction to wait.

Further, Rubin claims that Class A sludge—the fertilizers that can be used without restriction on home gardens as well as on crops—"has undergone treatment to eliminate all pathogenic organisms." If that is so, why does the EPA, in its final 503 regulation, require that "Class A sludge with respect to pathogens must be applied to or placed on the land within eight hours after being discharged from the pathogen treatment process"? Or that "the sewage sludge must be incorporated into the soil within six hours after being applied to or placed on the land"? The EPA explains that this rule is designed to prevent the "regrowth of salmonella bacteria." In fact, as Dorn reports in *Environmental Research*, "studies of carrier rates and serotypes of salmonella [bacteria] in cattle grazing on sludge-treated pastures in Switzerland have indicated a positive association and a cycle of infection

from humans to sludge to animals to humans."

Rubin goes on to write that EPA data proves that pathogens are not a problem in the sludge. He cites the Technical Support Document (TSD) for the Pathogen Reduction Requirements of the 503 Rule, which he claims "conclusively demonstrates" that the current approved methods of reducing pathogens "yield a biosolids [sludge] devoid of pathogens."

Yet a 1989 peer review of Part 503 commissioned by the EPA took a very different view. The review noted "serious scientific deficiencies" in the EPA's document—such as the "common misinterpretation and misuse" of data, which was not based on real-world tests—and concluded that "the risk assessment components of the EPA Proposed Rule and TSD need considerable improvement."

Finally, I wrote that "the EPA admits that when drawing up 503 it did not take into account the possible impact of sludge contaminants seeping into the water supply and leaching into the soil. Nor has the EPA examined how sludge fertilizer might affect wildlife." Rubin says my statement is "completely false and without merit" and that, on the contrary, the EPA has established a "multimedia 14 pathway risk assessment" that proves sludge is safe.

However, the same peer review singled out the EPA's computerized risk assessment for harsh criticism: "Computer models for risk assessment from sludge applied pollutants are inadequate. Conceptualization is poor, and validation with field results were missing. ... We did not regard it as our responsibility nor did time permit us to correct every error in the Proposed Rule of the Technical Support Document." As the old saying goes, if you put garbage in, you get garbage out.

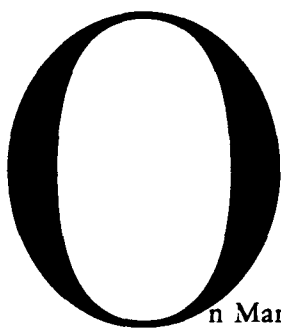
In fact, the EPA all but admits that its own environmental assessment is not to be taken seriously. According to the EPA's final 503 regulation, one of the foremost challenges the agency encountered in drawing up its regulation was "assessing the potential for adverse effects on public health and the environment from pollutants in sludge. This is particularly difficult with respect to non-human health effects, given the limited information available to the Agency in this area." The report went on to note that "the methods for evaluating non-human health effects are less well-developed than those the Agency has traditionally relied on for evaluating human health effects. ... EPA's confidence in the risk assessment is necessarily limited by the data available to the EPA and by the lack of accepted risk assessment methodologies in certain areas."

In short, the EPA's own documents provide more than enough evidence to raise public concern about the agency's new plan to fertilize the nation's food crops with waste from our municipal sewer systems. But thanks to successful PR gambits like Rubin's concocted memo, the public remains unaware that part of what they ate today went down the toilet yesterday.

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WELFARE

Wageless in Wisconsin



n March 14, 1996, five days before the state Republican presidential primary, Wisconsin legislators passed the first comprehensive state plan abolishing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The legislation—known as Wisconsin Works, or W-2 for short—still requires federal approval, and won't take full effect until 1999. But when it does, it will end entitlement to welfare, require virtually all recipients to work and place a lifetime limit of five years on support.

Despite vocal opposition from labor and community groups, passage of W-2 was never in doubt. Republicans control both the governor's house and the legislature, and a series of well-publicized bipartisan welfare reforms in the late '80s long ago proved the issue's popularity. What remains unclear is how the program—which will catapult

53,000 adults into the labor market and will require a doubling of the state's child-care capacity—will be administered. Also unknown is whether Wisconsin will receive necessary waivers from the Clinton administration for the numerous provisions of W-2 that run contrary to current federal law.

Despite these uncertainties, for Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, passage of W-2 was a political triumph. Widely touted as a prospective running mate for Bob Dole in November, and having pegged his national reputation to the issue of welfare reform, Thompson can now say he's succeeded where both Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich have failed—he's "ended welfare as we know it," at least in Wisconsin. If Republicans retain control of the House of Representatives in November, W-2—already the subject of national attention—may also help renew congressional momentum for ending the nation's 60-year-old system of federal support for poor children and their families, and passing responsibility for welfare back to the states.

According to Mark Greenberg of the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington, D.C., W-2 is part of a nationwide trend, not only toward state control of welfare, but away from extensive training, and toward moving people as quickly as possible into the first available job. Abetted by the Clinton administration's policy of liberal grants of waivers for state welfare experiments, and fueled by a growing impatience with job-training efforts, the conservative rationale for this movement is that poverty is due to individual behavior and irresponsibility—exacerbated by dependency on welfare. Actual work experience, together with making welfare less "attractive," is what is needed to integrate people into the job market.

If this argument is correct, programs like W-2 should decrease both welfare and poverty. If it is wrong, as it almost certainly is, such programs will not only plunge more people into poverty, but lower the wages of already low-income workers, raise costs for taxpayers and exacerbate a "race to the bottom" among states eager to cut their already strained budgets on the backs of the poor—those, in other words, who are least likely to vote.

It is ironic that Wisconsin is the first state to jettison AFDC. Long a bastion of progressive reform, Wisconsin enacted the nation's first unemployment and workers compensation laws, child labor legislation and progressive income tax. It has a vital labor movement and, since 1905, a world-class vocational education system that helped make it a high-skill manufacturing center. More recently, it has been known for its excellent education system, strong environmental protections and generous, well-administered welfare system.

But during the past several years Wisconsin has weakened environmental protections, passed property tax reform

Gov. Tommy Thompson ends welfare as we know it—and neglects the real crisis in low-wage labor.

By Katherine Sciacchitano

that favors the privileged and capped spending for education, among other conservative measures. According to a 1996 report by the Center on Wisconsin Strategy, a University of Wisconsin-based think tank, despite low unemployment rates and a strong state economy, wages fell at more than double the national rate between 1989 and 1993.

While W-2 reflects the broad conservative emphasis on personal responsibility and "cultural"—as opposed to economic—causes of poverty, economic pressures also contributed to its passage. In the late '70s and early '80s, Wisconsin's manufacturing base was hit hard by plant closings and the Reagan recession. Between 1982 and 1986 the state saw its comparatively generous welfare benefits increase 28 percent while caseloads grew at four times the national rate. Although by 1986 a strong economic recovery saw caseloads declining, the public mood was set.

Thompson discovered the power of welfare reform as an electoral issue during his first gubernatorial campaign. Since 1987 his administration has proposed, and passed, more welfare reform experiments than any other state. The numerous reforms have all built on a 1986 Democrat-backed welfare-to-work program that required participants to work, or engage in training or other preparations for work, in exchange for guarantees of support services such as child care and training. And many of the reforms increased benefits—for example, by extending Medicaid eligibility past the loss of AFDC benefits, or allowing AFDC recipients to keep more of their earnings. But more important than the effects of the reforms on recipients—which have been difficult to determine because of the lack of adequate evaluation plans for the programs—are the bottom-line cuts in benefits they enacted. Between 1986 and 1994 the changes lowered benefits by almost a third, and coincided with a reduction in welfare rolls of nearly 25 percent.

In 1993, driven in part by a deeply held belief that the present system of welfare is dehumanizing, the Democratic legislature, led by an African-American Democratic state representative from Milwaukee named Antonio Riley, tried to steal Thompson's thunder. Legislators passed a bill mandating that Thompson produce, by 1995, a proposal for welfare reform that would guarantee jobs to those who could work and a minimum income to those who couldn't. Using a line-item veto, Thompson stripped away these requirements and, with the assistance of a newly elected Republican majority, upped the ante by producing W-2 instead, pushing through its passage in four months.

Many elements of W-2 resemble other state experiments;

Thompson's innovation is to combine these features into a single program. W-2 participants—custodial parents who are not disabled and who earn no more than 115 percent of the federal poverty level—will report to job centers, where they will be channeled into available full-time jobs. Those finding actual employment will be eligible for food stamps and state and federal Earned Income Tax Credits. Under certain circumstances they will also be eligible for health and child-care benefits.

If participants cannot find unsubsidized work, they will be expected to work in a subsidized trial job (the employer gets the subsidy), or assigned to a community service or transitional job with a subminimum wage in the form of a "grant." No other cash support will be provided.

Unlike previous programs that penalized failure to work with reductions in grants, under W-2, failure will mean withdrawal of all support. W-2 also imposes a time limit of five years, after which participants are on their own. Support for post-secondary and vocational education has been replaced by limited training assistance tailored only to the most immediate employment needs. As the program's principles state: "For those who can work, only work should pay."

W-2's approach makes sense if one assumes, as do conservative critics of the

welfare state such as Newt Gingrich and Charles Murray, that people on welfare do not want to work and must be forced to do so. But the facts on the ground refute this such shibboleths. Nationally, 70 percent of AFDC recipients move off welfare within two years. For most, the real problem is not "welfare dependency," but "cycling" on and off welfare because of unstable employment, poverty-level wages and lack of access to the kind of education that has been shown to improve long-term employability.

Despite this evidence, W-2 assumes just the opposite: Most welfare recipients don't want to work, and would not voluntarily take advantage of job training and support services. And as a result, Thompson's legislation singles out the most vulnerable members of society for "harsh love" to spur them toward virtue. Seventy percent of Wisconsin's AFDC caseload is made up of children. And most of the other recipients are their mothers. Wages, or grants, in the case of community service and transitional jobs, will not vary by family size. Mothers of children as young as 12 weeks old will be forced to work, even though statewide only 34 percent of women with children under 2 work full time, and even though no other state requires parents of such young children to work. If parents fail in their attempts at work, W-2 offers no safety net for children apart from foster care. In Milwaukee, home to more than half of Wis-



Wisconsin Gov.
Tommy Thompson

consin's AFDC caseload, the anticipated explosion in demand for child care beyond existing capacity will leave thousands of poor children even more exposed to violence, drugs and crime than they already are.

While the law's cuts will chiefly harm participants and their children, W-2 carries risks for Wisconsin taxpayers as well. With vastly expanded requirements for child care, subsidized employment and one-stop job centers, W-2 will, conservatively, cost \$100 million more than AFDC. If W-2 is unsuccessful in moving people quickly into jobs, thereby further increasing demands for subsidized employment, or if W-2 fails altogether, it will cost even more—unless, of course, taxpayers simply refuse to fund it.

Backers of the reform tout Wisconsin's previous experiments as proof that W-2's work-based approach will be effective. But here, too, the empirical basis for optimism seems dubious, at best. Professor Michael Wiseman of the University of Wisconsin's Institute for Research on Poverty points out that researchers have yet to develop solid evaluations of Wisconsin's experiments from the late '80s. In the end, it is likely that Wisconsin's drop in caseloads owes less to workfare-type innovations than to the state's strong economy and tightened eligibility requirements for benefits, which reduced rolls not by moving people to work but by kicking them off. If this is true, according to Mark Greenberg of the Center for Law and Social Policy, the real test comes when the next recession hits.

David Newby, president of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, acknowledges that the idea of building a welfare system on work is not in itself all bad, since "in this society, work is what gives people a large part of their identity." But Newby argues that even at its current high level of start-up funding, W-2 won't have the resources necessary to lift participants out of the lowest reaches of the workforce. "For a program like W-2 to work, the jobs must not only exist, they must also be able to raise people out of poverty."

If a work-based welfare system could succeed anywhere in raising people out of poverty, it should be in Wisconsin. In 1995, Wisconsin had an unemployment rate of only 3 percent. Some parts of the state suffer chronic shortages of skilled labor. Yet even in Wisconsin, there is a serious mismatch between the skills people have and services they need to move out of the ranks of the working, or non-working, poor.

In an October 1995 study for the University of Wisconsin's Institute for Wisconsin's Future, Professor Anne Statham and Researcher Pamela Fendt calculated that under W-2, approximately 70,000 participants will compete with 125,000 other workers for employment—for a statewide shortfall of 110,000 jobs. For Milwaukee—home to nearly half the state's current AFDC caseload, and the area hardest hit by recent losses of unionized manufacturing jobs—Statham and Fendt placed the gap at almost 40,000. Although recent roll reductions and a drop in unemployment may have decreased the statewide gap, Fendt still calculates it at a substantial 73,000 jobs.

Of the full-time jobs created in Milwaukee, Statham and

Fendt report that 61 percent "require education, training, or occupation-specific experience beyond high school." Yet statewide, 40 percent of AFDC recipients have not even finished 12th grade; in Milwaukee, the figure is 75 percent. They also found that low-skilled workers face a daunting transportation gap. Seven out of 10 new jobs in Milwaukee are in the suburbs, while only 5 percent of AFDC recipients (most of whom live in the central city) have cars.

In other words, W-2 will be unable to provide sufficient numbers of real jobs for participants in the city that will have the highest concentration of W-2 participants, a serious problem for a work-based program.

Even more critical, W-2 is unlikely to be able to "make work pay." One of the classic contradictions of welfare programs is that supplementary benefits such as health care often decrease as wages increase, lowering income even as wages rise. Calculations by Wisconsin's Legislative Fiscal Bureau, a non-partisan research arm of the legislature, show W-2 will be no different. Families with two children needing child care will be worse off under W-2 than under AFDC. In many cases, program requirements of high co-payments for child and medical care will also ensure that disposable income decreases as earned income rises. For example, a single parent earning \$12 an hour in Milwaukee with two children needing day care will take less income home than a similar parent earning the minimum wage.

Given these contradictions, according to Democratic state Rep. Rebecca Young, the upshot of W-2—to the extent it moves people into work at all—will be to increase downward pressure on wages, subsidize minimum-wage jobs and create incentives for workers to collude with employers to keep wages low, since earning more may mean taking home less. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) in Washington, D.C., has already calculated that low and moderate wage earners in Wisconsin will lose an additional 8 percent in income from the sudden influx of AFDC recipients into the labor market. Since EPI's calculations are based on anticipated congressional reforms, which would require fewer people to work than W-2, the Wisconsin program, if successful, would likely have an even more severe effect.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) points out another danger. W-2 will require the creation of community service jobs on a scale beyond any recent experience. As a result, union officials argue, it may be almost impossible to prevent public workers earning union wages from being displaced by W-2 participants earning subminimum wage "grants"—even though AFSCME won protections in W-2 against replacing existing workers with participants.

Supporters of W-2 downplay criticisms of the plan, hailing it instead as a needed change and a foundation for future improvements. Republican state Sen. Mary Panzer, whose district is in the greater Milwaukee area, claims W-2 finally makes it possible for poor people to begin taking responsibility for their lives. Panzer would prefer to see a

more expansive job-training program to confront the demands of advancing workplace technologies and has authored several amendments to bolster the bill's still limited training opportunities. But she remains confident that these shortcomings will be remedied over time.

Steve Holt, a lobbyist on poverty policy for the city of Milwaukee, sees the failure to structure community service and transitional employment like "real jobs" as a critical shortcoming of W-2, since it is precisely real work experience—and real wages—that will supposedly move people into the labor force. He nevertheless believes W-2's emphasis on work will help end the stigma of "welfare" and pave the way for broader labor market reforms—among them, an inclusive training and support system for all workers.

But given the realities of W-2, promised improvements will be too late for many. Between 1989 and 1994, the period during which most of Wisconsin's welfare reforms were implemented, the percentage of Wisconsin children in poverty rose from 14.9 to 19.2, moving Wisconsin's national rank from fifth to 12th lowest. The poverty rate for black children is now the second highest in the nation. These should be sobering figures for people who think the present system is totally broken, and serves no purpose.

Also sobering is the fragility of what remains of Milwaukee's manufacturing base. Bruce Colburn, secretary-treasurer of the Milwaukee County Labor Council, believes that unless new workers are trained in time to replace retiring high-seniority workforces, Milwaukee—once known as the toolbox of the nation—will see its economy further weakened by more plant closings. Yet W-2 is also undermining the capacity of Wisconsin's vocational training system. According to Michael Rosen, legislative chair for the American Federation of Teachers local that represents teachers at the Milwaukee Area Technical College, W-2's failure to include post-secondary education in authorized W-2 training plans will not only reduce revenues for the state vocational colleges, but accelerate a trend toward privatizing training. "It will be done under the guise of making training more accessible to those in the community," says Rosen. "But in reality, it will mean more training by non-union workers, with fewer qualifications and resources, and in lower-tech facilities."

This host of problems only highlights that the real issue raised by W-2 is not simply the elimination of entitlements, or the number of individuals in poverty, but the need to reform the low-wage labor market. According to Laura Dresser of the Center on Wisconsin Strategy, in 1993 only 23 percent of Wisconsin's 377,000 adults living in poverty were on welfare; many of the rest worked at very low wages. For unions, addressing this problem would mean, among other things, organizing welfare recipients and other low-wage workers. More generally, for the public, it would mean a comprehensive employment policy that will do what W-2 claims it would do, but cannot: that is, to "make work pay," without undermining the wages of those already in the workforce or jeopardizing children and families.

• In this struggle, supporters of W-2 have contributed, some

of them unwittingly, an important insight for the left to build on: American welfare is divisive, effectively turning recipients into a caste stigmatized by the working majority. Most income supports in the United States are means-tested, ensuring that recipients are easy marks for political scapegoating. For many workers, the issue is, and will always be, "Why should I pay for someone who is not working to receive job training and family supports that I don't have myself?" W-2 explicitly recognizes this sentiment by declaring in its statement of principles that the fairness of its benefits is to be judged in relation to the standard of living of other low-wage workers.

The way out of this polarized climate of debate is to universalize, not to pare, so-called welfare benefits. Congressional threats to cut Medicare and Social Security make it abundantly clear that universal programs not only erase many suspicions and divisions, but create strong mass constituencies for social supports. Phil Neuenfeldt, secretary-treasurer of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, believes the answer is a comprehensive employment and training program that would be available to all workers and that would include, among other things, curricula developed jointly by labor and management; sufficient resources for delivery of training; and incentives to help motivate and support people who have been removed from the labor market. It would also lend greater logistical assistance, connecting people to actual jobs, and providing basic services like safe day care and reliable public transportation. Mobilization for such a program would have to reach deep into the community and seek increases in the minimum wage, build support for unionization, reform unemployment compensation laws that often exclude low-wage workers from benefits, oppose discriminatory employment practices, and demand economic development policies that foster creation of family-supporting jobs, rather than subsidizing minimum-wage ones.

At least for the time being, W-2 is likely to be cited as proof, both in Wisconsin and nationally, that "making work, and only work, pay" is sound policy, and that additional supports erode, rather than foster, personal responsibility. Indeed, Spencer Coggs, an African-American Democratic state representative from Milwaukee, argues that state Republicans deliberately designed W-2 to force opponents into a defensive game, fighting as hard as they could to restore even basic protections. But in American welfare policy, as in so many other issues on which the left finds itself at a standstill, the best defense is a good offense. If we are to fight anything but a rearguard—and losing—battle to preserve rapidly diminishing benefits, we have to shift the terms of debate. Defending welfare entitlements for "other people" is far less politically and morally compelling than advocating a comprehensive program of employment rights and support for all workers. And without a vigorous opposition championing a compelling alternative, W-2 and similar reforms will continue to garner popular support among many workers for programs that will only increase poverty, raise administrative costs and lower workers' own wages.

• Katherine Sciacchitano is a former labor lawyer and organizer who now teaches at the University of Wisconsin School for Workers.

BLACK AMERICA

Breaking convention

M

any African-American leaders had hoped to forge a united political presence out of a landmark national convention to follow up (and provide commentary) on the major parties' national conventions this summer. Yet early plans for the convention appear to have run aground on organizational confusion and disputes over strategy.

Black activists and scholars hatched the idea of the convention last year at a gathering called by the National African American Leadership Summit (NAALS). Flush from its recent success in sponsoring the Million Man March, the NAALS—a consortium of black organizations created by former NAACP leader Benjamin F. Chavis—convened a follow-up meeting a month after the October 16 march.

The convention was the brainchild of Ronald Walters, chair of Howard University's political science

department and a former aide to presidential candidate Jesse Jackson. The NAALS would hold the convention after the Republican and Democratic conventions, and utilize it as a forum to evaluate the platforms of the presidential nominees as they relate to black concerns. The notion of a national black political convention was also nourished by the unprecedented support of Nation of Islam (NOI) leader Louis Farrakhan, who promised to bring the organizational might of his disciplined minions into the political fray.

"We envisioned this convention as a way of promoting a new politics of accountability," explains Walters, who was picked to head NAALS' political participation task force. "The political brokering strategy we have been using has just about run its course," he says. "The situation is such that [President Bill] Clinton can gain poll points by defying black brokering agents just to show white America that he can stand up to blacks'

demands. Clearly we need a more effective political strategy, and I recommended that we go full speed ahead in the politics of accountability."

The convention had also been expected to follow a spring policy conference designed to bring together many of the leading intellectuals in the African-American community to help develop a political agenda. The agenda in turn would inform the politics of the convention and provide a useful benchmark for assessing Clinton's and Dole's accountability. In the enthusiastic wake of the Million Man March, some NAALS members predicted that the planned convention would be the most significant since 1972, when more than 8,000 activists and elected officials met in Gary, Ind., for the first National Black Political Convention.

But that enthusiasm has waned, and Walters now complains that his plans were met with disinterest and even some resistance. "Many of us didn't want this to be yet another conference of black nationalists," Walters says. "The politics have to be more inclusive in order to be more legitimate. We wanted an authentic collective black politics to emerge, and I got the sense that wasn't happening." Walters has resigned his NAALS position.

The idea for a black political convention has been percolating among African-American activists for many years, and the confluence of the GOP "revolution" and the Million Man March has generated a new spirit of urgency. What's more, the Democrats are moving steadily rightward, trying to recapture their declining white constituency. And since African-Americans have nowhere else to go, the Democratic Party can take them for granted even more blatantly than it has in the past.

In order to offset this gross imbalance, theorists like Wal-

An ambitious plan to hold a national black political convention runs afoul of black organizational politics.

By Salim Muwakkil

ters urge the establishment of an "independent rainbow" party that will champion an agenda reflecting the interest of African-Americans. But other voices caution that the stakes are too high to risk a Republican victory. Should the Republicans maintain their 1994 congressional gains or recapture the White House, they undoubtedly would intensify the destruction of the social welfare state, devastating those segments of the African-American community already suffering from the initial round of GOP-backed assaults on the social safety net.

What's more, the candidate elected in November will almost certainly appoint the next chief justice of the Supreme Court and possibly more associate justices. And since the top court has become the primary venue for addressing crucial issues of black politics and economics, the black community also has a disproportionate stake in judicial appointments.

"We have to be careful not to so alienate the Democratic Party that we elect a Republican president," says David Bositis, a senior analyst with the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington-based, black-oriented think tank. "African-Americans already know what the Republicans have done since they took over the Congress. There should be little mystery about what would happen if a Republican is elected president."

But the Democrat who is president is doing little for the cause of African-Americans. For example, no sooner had Clinton offered his "mend it, don't end it" poetry about affirmative action, than his administration began taking steps to eliminate an entire class of federal set-aside provisions. The Democratic president has also signed the "Anti-Terrorism Act," which contains provisions so restrictive that even law-and-order Republicans expressed some reservations on civil rights grounds. The act imposes new time limits for the filing of habeas corpus petitions, which greatly circumscribes the prospect for legal appeals filed by the nation's large African-American prison population. The aggressive police actions enacted under the law will also, to judge by past "anti-terrorist" campaigns, disproportionately harm the African-American community.

Clinton has also appointed an Army general to head up the "war on drugs," the major casualties of which have been black youth. The list goes on, prompting many to ask why should black Americans continue supporting a Democratic administration that has capitulated so abjectly to the right-wing zeitgeist?

The answer, of course, is that it is the lesser of two evils. And that depressingly familiar refrain is why organizers lament the abortive plans for establishing a stronger independent presence in American politics. Co-chairing the convention effort with Walters was Ron Daniels of the Center for Constitutional Rights. Like Walters, Daniels, the former executive director of the National Rainbow Coalition, has bowed out of the effort. "Things didn't seem to be shaping up to the kind of meaningful, inclusive affair that we had envisioned," Daniels says. "I had a choice of working on something that seems at best unfocused and too narrow in

scope and of working on other important issues, so I just decided to focus my energy in other directions."

Neither Daniels nor Walters would pinpoint the exact sources of their misgivings, but it's clear that confusion within the ranks of the NAALS is high on the list. And the defection of these two respected leaders is a particularly damning commentary on the NAALS; both have steadfastly advanced the group's philosophy of "operational unity," the strategy of organizing the various strands of the black movement on larger, specific issues of common concern to the African-American community. The strategy also conspicuously includes Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, which has brought the NAALS its most virulent criticism.

Both men say their disenchantment had nothing to do with Farrakhan's presence in the group; in fact, they insist his presence was legitimate and necessary. However, they do hint that Chavis' black nationalist orientation tended to alienate others less committed to those beliefs.

One of the NAALS' founding principles is the refusal of funding from groups outside of the African-American community. And while that frees the group from the pressures of philanthropic whites, it makes the NAALS even more dependent on the economic and organizational wherewithal of the Nation of Islam. Thus Chavis often appears to be little but a deputy of Farrakhan. The impression was hardened recently, when Farrakhan surprised the NAALS leadership by announcing his preference for holding a black political convention before those of the two major parties. "At our political convention we want to influence the formation of the platforms of the two parties," Farrakhan said in a Washington speech last month.

Chavis, who was in the audience, had until then been touting the wisdom of holding a black convention following the Republicans and Democrats. But following Farrakhan's speech, he too began to talk about a precursor convention. Farrakhan ostensibly has endorsed the concept of operational unity and cooperative leadership, but longtime activists remain unconvinced that the NOI chief can share control. The quiet defection of two key political players from a Farrakhan alliance will make them even harder to convince.

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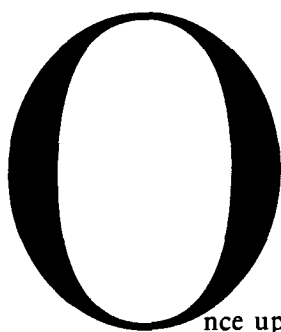
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L A B O R

Going it alone

*Backers of
a new labor
party look
to a post-
Democratic
future for
American
workers.*

By David Moberg



Once upon a time, long, long ago, Democratic Party leaders could reasonably argue—though they were rarely inclined to do so—that their party was America's pallid version of a European labor or social-democratic party. But over the past two decades, the party has steadily moved to the right, following the lead of the Republicans. Once it was clearly seen as the friend of working people, but by 1994 half the respondents to one opinion poll identified the Democrats as the “party of the rich.” Though most union leaders still hope to put some liberal backbone in the Democrats again, a significant minority of American unionists are calling for more drastic measures: They want a labor party worthy of the name.

At least since Franklin Roosevelt's second election in 1936, when the new CIO provided critical money and

people power for the campaign, organized labor has closely identified with the Democrats and New Deal social legislation. At the same time, unions hewed to an official line of nonpartisan independence, maintaining that their support of candidates was simply a matter of rewarding friends and punishing enemies. They did occasionally support Republicans, especially when it helped to buy influence on their own narrow issues, but in practice labor and the Democrats remained warily allied.

The Republicans' 1994 congressional victory—made possible largely because more voters of the Democrats' historical core constituency stayed home or crossed party lines—sounded the warning that the old political formulas had stopped working. Over the years the Democrats delivered less and less to labor, and union members and leaders tired of Democrats taking their money (97 percent of the \$239 million in labor political action committee money raised from 1979 to 1994 went to Democrats) while ignoring their advice and interests. A new generation of Democrats

grew up, especially in the late '70s and '80s, that derided labor as just another special interest group and increasingly turned to business as a source of campaign money. At the same time, union membership was shrinking; unions failed to reach out to new and growing sectors of the workforce. Ineffectual before the ideological onslaught of Reaganism, they also seemed to abandon any pretenses to lead the movement for social justice.

Now revived by the election of John Sweeney as AFL-CIO president, labor unions are groping for a more effective strategy. With its new \$35 million political fund, the AFL-CIO is not simply writing checks for Democrats. While unions will continue to endorse and fund candidates and, with some exceptions, support Democratic Party institutions, unions intend to focus more on framing their own agendas and educating members—and the general public—on key issues such as the minimum wage and Medicare cuts. In several dozen congressional districts, organized labor is also training a new core group of grass-roots union activists who will work on politics beyond election day.

Some union leaders want to go further. In early June roughly 1,200 delegates representing local unions, central labor councils and a few national unions—the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees, the United Electrical Workers and Longshoremen on the West Coast—will gather in Cleveland to launch an American labor party. The brainchild of Tony Mazzocchi, currently assistant to OCAW President Bob Wages, Labor Party Advocates started in 1991 and now claims its union supporters represent more than 1 million people, about 6 percent of the labor

movement. (The "Advocates" formed to organize this founding convention, which will decide on the party's name.) The group includes many unlikely suspects, such as the supposedly conservative skilled trades and craft unions, but it does not include top leaders of any of the biggest, historically progressive unions.

The idea of a labor party is a hoary staple of left and union politics. Mazzocchi, at 69 years old a veteran of five decades of union work, remembers as a boy in Brooklyn leafletting for the short-lived American Labor Party of the 1940s. But around 1990 his surveys of OCAW members—mostly well-paid, skilled workers who range from liberal strongholds of the Northeast to conservative Texas bastions—convinced him that there was strong rank-and-file alienation from both Democrats and Republicans and support for a new labor party.

The support of unionists notwithstanding, the Labor Party Advocates faces the daunting task of making their party an effective and relevant contender in American electoral politics. Third parties have typically fared poorly in American politics, though the Populists and Socialists both influenced Democratic Party agendas. But Mazzocchi and Wages have a novel approach. They want the new labor party to hold off running or endorsing candidates in elections for the foreseeable future. Instead, they intend to use the party to frame the nation's political debate in terms of class—a broad working class against irresponsible, unaccountable corporate power.

"We're not ready for the electoral arena," Mazzocchi says. "Most of us come out of many years of organizing, coming up against large corporate entities that are very formidable. We're not prepared to enter an arena that requires enormous resources." Instead, their labor party will develop an ideological framework for workers—something few workers now have, according to surveys of union members—and carry out actions, possibly a campaign for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing a right to a job.

In many ways, the agenda of the new labor party is not all that different from what the new AFL-CIO is doing. Indeed, AFL-CIO Political Director Steve Rosenthal sees the labor party as complementary to his effort. Likewise, Mazzocchi calls the new AFL-CIO work a "sea change from the days of plunking down money and endorsing candidates." Also, since it won't run candidates, the new labor party will resemble citizen organizations such as Citizen Action or the Industrial Areas Foundation network, which try to influence politicians and legislation. But both Mazzocchi and Wages say the labor party will be more ideological. With the AFL-CIO campaign, Wages says, "the issues are being served up not by us but by others. We are not framing the debate."

As an indication of its commitment to redefine political issues, the group's draft statement of principles includes such demands as a constitutional right to a job at a living wage, an income stability fund to protect workers against job dislocation and downsizing, free higher education for all, assur-

ance of basic social needs (single-payer health care, longer paid vacations, affordable day care) and shorter work time. It also calls for international fair trade based on respect for minimal international labor standards, an end to "corporate welfare," simpler and more progressive taxation and full democratic rights at work, including protection of free speech, the right to union representation and the right to strike without replacement workers or scabs. The tentative statement also calls for a just transition to a non-polluting economic system and genuine equality of opportunity.

Above all, the initiators of the labor party want to focus on class issues and avoid as much as possible what they see as counterproductive and divisive social issues, such as gun rights. They've also worked hard to minimize the influence of small sectarian left groups while not excluding anyone. Building-trades locals and state councils are far more likely to dominate the convention than diehard Trotskyists.

Wages describes the party's core principle as economic populism—to "make the corporations accountable"—and he doesn't care how that goal is realized. "In 10 years I'd like to see the labor party be a political influence, define it anyway you want," he says. "If we've rebuilt the Democratic Party, that's fine. If we have a party, that's fine. But there has to be political expression for the majority."

Wages frankly acknowledges that most unions in the new labor party, including his own, will continue to participate in the AFL-CIO political effort and will likely endorse Bill Clinton. But to those union leaders who regard a Clinton defeat as "the end of the world as we know it," Wages retorts, "If he wins, it means continuation of life as we know it. Neither is acceptable."

Many supporters will try to push the labor party to run candidates prematurely, but organizers seem wisely determined to resist. Yet without the test of real-life political combat, the party could become a utopian debating society or worse. On the other hand, if it can develop non-electoral campaigns, as many citizen groups have done, it may come to have a substantial impact on American politics. It will complement the changes under way within the AFL-CIO and many unions, pressure Democratic politicians and create new opportunities for organizing efforts. With its clear advocacy of workers' interests and its willingness to raise bold ideas, it may help reverse the rightward shift American political debate has undergone in recent years. Yet its base in a segment of labor unions, while providing immediate institutional strength, ultimately is too narrow for a real alternative party.

Wages and Mazzocchi want to build the labor party's strength so that it can form meaningful alliances, and they want to have a measurable impact. "If the purpose of life is to go to endless meetings for endless discussions and nothing happens," the cheerfully blunt Wages says, "then I might as well stay in bed. We owe it to ourselves and to workers—unorganized and organized—to try to do this. I'm not afraid to fail. The worst thing is that people who think it will fail will say, 'I told you so.'"

THE ACADEMY

Textual reckoning

The social reproduction of seriousness is a fundamental—perhaps the fundamental—hegemonic manoeuvre. Once the high language has attained the commanding position of being able to specify what is and what is not to be taken seriously, its control over the language of society is virtually assured.

—Allon White, *Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing*

***A scholarly
hoax puts a
transgression-
minded journal
of theory on the
defensive.***

By Tom Frank

Almost from its inception, the playful practice of poststructuralism has been dogged by a curious sense of its own absurdity. The high theorists of the genre often veer toward—and sometimes beyond—high silliness. There's something about the field's combination of nearly incomprehensible jargon, its grand claims of subversiveness and its practitioners' air of self-importance and professorial correctness that makes it a natural, even obligatory, target of parody and farce. A discipline that makes much of puns and cleverness, it issues a standing challenge to the prank-inclined: I dare you to outwit me. So formulaic does the real academic article sometimes seem—every new essay on *Dallas* or *The Simpsons* or *Seinfeld* using the same buzzwords, performing the same readings, striking the same pseu-

do-populist poses and reaching the same predictable conclusions—that critic Meaghan Morris once wondered whether “somewhere in some English publisher's vault there is a master-disk from which thousands of versions of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption are being run off under different names with minor variations.”

This is why most of the professors and graduate students I know reacted with giddiness when they heard about physicist Alan Sokal's admission in *LinguaFranca* that his article on postmodern science that appeared in the Spring/Summer 1996 issue of *Social Text*, the respected journal of cultural studies

and theory, was in fact a hoax. Sokal's essay bears all the earmarks of a classic prank: Plausible enough on the surface to get by *Social Text*'s panel of respected academic editors, it is spotted as a hoax immediately by those who are more skeptical of the magazine's mission. Entitled “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,” it conforms to the genre's conventions with a hilariously studied slavishness. Sokal carefully includes the usual pious references to the “subversive” power of interdisciplinarity; he takes pains to flatter and agree with the editors of *Social Text* and goes out of his way to assail their usual targets; he summons the usual barrage of references and quotations, many of them predictably impenetrable; and he closes with confused calls for an “emancipatory mathematics” and “a liberatory postmodern science.”

It's all formally correct, but an attentive reader quickly notices that there's something amiss. In the second paragraph Sokal asserts that “it has ... become increasingly apparent that physical ‘reality,’ no less than social ‘reality,’ is at bottom a social and linguistic construct”; in other words, that society is prior to physical reality. By the fifth page he is issuing exclamations of outrage and amazement over rather unremarkable facts and soon thereafter offering up hopelessly convoluted paeans to undecidability. The article's profusion of notes are particularly comical, referring to the most impenetrable quotations as “exact” or “eminently accessible,” announcing that a book's “title makes plain” its “pro-nuclear-energy worldview” after he has given as its title the simple and inoffensive phrase *Radon Measures*.

“I confess, I don't understand half of the jargon I used,” Sokal says. “But that's part of the point, that one can get an article accepted and look like an expert even if you don't understand what you're talking about.” A longstanding leftist (Sokal taught in Nicaragua under the Sandinista government, a fact he takes pains to foreground whenever discussing his deed) and disturbed by what he calls “sloppy thinking” in the academic left's critique of science, Sokal resolved to intervene in a forcible and humiliating manner. “I took the silliest things written about physics and mathematics by the most prominent people,” he recalls, then

"invent[ed] an argument relating it all."

The essay was designed to push current tendencies in cultural studies of science far past the point of reasonableness, Sokal notes, marveling after its publication that anyone could "actually take seriously an article that starts out saying, it used to be that most Western intellectuals believed that there exists an external world, but now we know that to be a mistake." The essay's scientific pronouncements, he believes, should have instantly tipped off any natural scientist—"at the end of the first two paragraphs, if they don't immediately realize it's a parody, [they] will think that the author is completely off his rocker"—but readers in the humanities and social sciences should have registered alarm as well. Referring to the unwarranted ideological assertions with which the essay concludes, Sokal says, "I intentionally wrote it so that the political section was itself full of logical holes. I wanted to see if the reviewers would say, 'Could you please give more examples to illustrate how postmodern science supports the progressive political project, or how this, or how the other?'"

And what did the journal's reviewers say? According to Sokal, "I got no reviewers' reports at all." *Social Text's* managing editor, Monica Marcinkiewicz, avers that several editors did in fact read Sokal's manuscript, but the only changes Sokal recalls them demanding were related to the article's length and the unbearably distended train of footnotes that drag along behind. "I got no substantive comments," he says.

Sokal does not deny the various important scholarly contributions *Social Text* has made over the years, nor does he have much of a quarrel with the version of social constructivism expressed by many of the issue's contributors, nor does he profess any particular rancor toward the journal or its editors. But Sokal insists, in any event, that his parody essay was not intended just as a prank, a cruel means of mocking the science-illiteracy of *Social Text's* editors. It was, rather, but as a political act, a way of drawing attention to certain common but misguided tendencies on the academic left. With all Sokal's facetious celebrations of "transgression," his reverent talk of "uncertainty" and "discontinuity," and above all his opening proclamation that external reality doesn't exist, he aims to render ridiculous the now fairly standard tendency in cultural studies by which the questioning of "master narratives" is equated with the most meaningful sort of political action. "The project is not really so much to defend science, it's to defend the left from itself," explains Barbara Epstein, a Sokal collaborator, a longtime left activist, and also the chair of the History of Consciousness program at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "To defend the left from the faux-left."

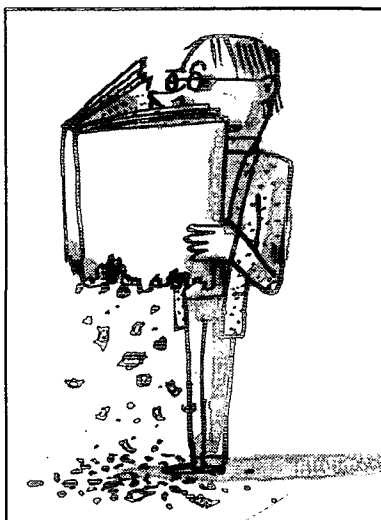
According to Epstein, the problem with self-proclaimed academic radicals isn't that they're the scourges of order

that both they and a certain strain of right-wing critics imagine them to be, but that they've become disconnected from meaningful political action, that they inhabit "a world of make-believe" detached from "reality" as completely as Sokal's prank article seems to allow. "Politics in the way I think of politics isn't taken seriously" by this strain of pseudo-dissidents, Epstein continues. "It's politics as a pose. You take a stance in which you align yourself with various movements that you imagine to be out there. And the last thing you're going to do is express a genuine concern for building those movements. It's more a matter of positioning yourself in such a way that you're seen as associated with radical movements."

For all this radical posturing, Epstein believes the cultural studies left to be a creature of two distinctly un-radical forces: an "aestheticized" concept of intellectual sophistication on the one hand, according to which leading scholars are expected to make ever-more outrageous assertions of their own subversiveness and transgression; and "an extraordinary degree of intellectual conformity" among the rank and file, as they "look to the celebrities to define what one is supposed to think, and what vocabulary one is supposed to use."

Epstein illustrates her perception of the situation by referring to a public lecture at Berkeley given a number of years ago by Judith Butler, a reigning intellectual who, in her influential book *Gender Trouble*, argues that human sexual difference (not merely conceptions of gender, but actual physical sexual difference) is socially constructed. "She started the lecture off by asking, is there anyone here who thinks she is a woman? Not one hand went up," despite the fact that the audience was composed almost entirely of female intellectuals. "Because they all knew enough [about Butler's work] to know it was not hip to think you were a woman. So they knew that ... anybody who put her hand up would be offering herself up for ridicule." Butler had performed the standard pseudo-radical maneuver of "one-upmanship," staking out what was "the most sophisticated position ... the position that sexual difference is socially constructed, [that] the male-female distinction is an ideological distinction." And her audience dutifully fell into line behind the leader: "Therefore, you get 400 people in a room, none of whom is willing to say she is a woman."

But that's just theory. "All of these people, meanwhile, are doing their best to pursue their careers," Epstein points out. "They're certainly not actually transgressing anything, or taking any chances. ... They have a lot of power within the academy, they're very anxious to stay on the track of upward mobility. Prestige, status and so forth are certainly very important." And to those who enter the university with progressive sentiments, the cultural studies mavens teach



"that left politics is not about what you accomplish, it's not about making a serious assessment of what the possibilities are and how one can organize a movement so as to accomplish whatever is possible, that left politics is really a matter of posturing. ... Left politics is a matter of avant-garde aesthetics and the pursuit of celebrity-hood."

In a sense, then, cultural studies "becomes what it's studying," Epstein charges. "The fascination with being a celebrity, the cult of the individual personality, the sense that nothing is real, everything is a matter of appearances." Not only does such a species of left practice offer little challenge to the corporate order but, needless to say, it opens itself up to easy parody and pranks like Sokal's, in which deafeningly foolish content is overlooked by reigning academic authorities in deference to the most craven kind of posturing of them all: Sokal's endless invocation of all the right names.

This understanding of the prank as evidence of a battle within the academic left is contested by one of its putative targets, *Social Text* editor Andrew Ross. "I don't doubt his intentions, that he really does feel there's a debate among left intelligentsia," Ross says. But Sokal's attack on the epistemological relativism of those who study the social context of science misses the target entirely: "It doesn't really correspond to anything I believe in personally," Ross says. "It doesn't correspond to any of the work that I respect in science studies or the cultural studies of science, and it certainly doesn't speak to anything anyone did in the issue." Sokal's "caricatures of social constructionists as people who don't believe that the world exists" bear little resemblance to the actual scholars *Social Text* published in its science issue, Ross points out, nor does the central trope in Sokal's parody, the misplaced quotings from Derrida and Lacan, have much to do with the theoretical interests of many contemporary students of science.

In fact, as Ross points out, the only reason Sokal's article made it into print at all was the unique interdisciplinary openness of *Social Text*, the willingness of its editorial collective to publish works in fields with which they are not intimately familiar. And Sokal's *LinguaFranca* article, in which the prank is revealed, betrays a certain mean-spiritedness. Jay Williams, managing editor of *Critical Inquiry*, the prestigious interdisciplinary journal of social criticism, argues that Sokal's self-exposé seemed to gloat that scientific practice is "basically ... unavailable to the untrained mind." "Through satire," Williams continues, "ordinarily one hopes for some kind of rapprochement between combatants," a new resolve to "pursue study in a better and more productive way. But this was an attempt at public humiliation and does nothing to advance the cause of bringing theory and science together."

All of which is unfortunate since, as Ross concedes, Sokal's prank "will divert people's attention away from the other articles in the issue"—articles that address the obviously crucial subject of the political and corporate uses of science. And while he disagrees with the methodological assumptions of the cultural studies crowd, Sokal himself

admits to the paramount importance of their research: "There are lots of serious issues concerning science and technology that the left can be investigating," he says. "And Ross is interested in a lot of these."

But the most revealing reactions to the prank are those of *Social Text*'s publishers. In spite of its usual tendency to celebrate the upending of authority, the twitting of order and anti-hierarchical gestures, the journal has retreated quickly into talk of professional ethics and betrayal of academic good faith. Even Stanley Fish, executive director of Duke University Press (*Social Text*'s publisher) and a scholar who has deftly transmuted textual indeterminacy into professional renown, has gotten involved in the question, issuing a statement supporting *Social Text* and chiding Sokal for using his "professional credentials" to deceive.

And one can't help but conclude that, in one sense, maybe Fish has got it right: For all the big issues that appear to be involved, this is ultimately a battle over competing definitions of professionalism, nothing more. The poststructuralist jargon Sokal deployed so devastatingly is the sacred talk of a professional group, a private banter whose function is precisely to keep outsiders like Sokal out. But it's a jargon with a curious twist, a professional language that celebrates anti-professionalism, that fetishizes the subversive power of transgression and the virtue of the democratic multitude. Over the years it has always moved quickly enough—obsoleting itself as soon as it is taken up by a wider audience—to stay ahead of the crushing consequences of this contradiction, allowing cultural studies academics to present themselves, with only limited difficulty, as a professional vanguard of the popular will. But it is the exposing of this contradiction that gives Sokal's deed such resonance.

About 70 pages before Sokal's article in *Social Text* one finds a representative statement of the academic perspective that Sokal means to question, an essay by anthropologist Sarah Franklin in which she announces that "science is now up for deconstruction" and asserts that "objectivity and disciplinarity," since they "rely upon exclusion and the establishment of a privileged, partial perspective," are "keyed to power effects." That was then, this is now. Its challenge to "disciplinarity" having met with a rude riposte, *Social Text* has promptly retreated into the safety of professionalism. Yesterday—again, in the same issue that published Sokal's piece—its authors railed against "rules," spoke joyously (in the case of historian Sharon Traweek) of "complexity, composition, instabilities, variations, transformations, irregularities, patterns, morphing, and diversity in performance"; today its publishers circle the wagons and remind outsiders of their ancient privileges. One Duke University Press spokesman denounces Sokal's "unethical" behavior and calls attention to his disregard for "academic good faith and intellectual honesty." To attack the existence of physical reality is one thing; but satirizing the professional serious-speak of pomo academia's leading lights is a transgression not to be brooked.

Tom Frank is the editor of *The Baffler*.

VIEWPOINT

Toward real corporate responsibility

By Fred Block

Now that the curious spectacle of Pat Buchanan's "peasant revolt" run at the presidency has faded, the political mainstream seems determined to ignore once again corporate downsizing and the irresponsibility of business leaders. While Bob Dole's insensitivity to these issues is totally predictable, the complacent message of a recent Clinton administration report on the U.S. labor market was not so different from Dole's outlook. The study by the Council of Economic Advisers and the Labor Department found that the job picture is getting better and suggested that there is no big cause for worry. Republicans and Democrats seem equally clueless as to what can be done to reform the way that U.S. corporations are governed and managed. The American left, too, has failed to offer fresh thinking or sound policy ideas, compounding the sense that these problems are unsolvable.

Yet the public's deepening economic anxiety is directly linked to the irrationality of corporate governance. Corporations have helped increase inequality by lavishing huge salaries on CEOs and other top executives while doing everything they can—union-busting, subcontracting, fighting minimum-wage increases—to limit wages for the millions who are not in the executive suites. Even the *Wall Street Journal* now looks askance at \$30-million-a-year salaries and stock-option packages for CEOs. The top executives of 30 of the largest U.S. firms now make 212 times the pay of the average American employee. (The equivalent multiple in 1965 was 44.) Meanwhile, corporations have sacrificed the job security of their employees in the foolish pursuit of downsizing as an end in itself. Corporate executives and investors, it seems, share the utterly perverse view that the most profitable firm is one with no employees at all.

Not surprisingly, corporate managers have been extreme-

ly reluctant to invest in developing the skills and capacities of their employees. Many firms have become much more interested in paper entrepreneurship than in making actual goods and services. The dizzying rounds of corporate mergers and breakups generate huge paper profits and fat commissions, but they rarely contribute to increased efficiency. In the meantime, corporate investment in plant and equipment has fallen to historically low levels. Non-residential fixed investment as a percentage of GDP had fallen to 10.4 percent in 1994 as compared to rates of more than 13 percent at the end of the 1970s. Finally, corporate managers have become addicted to the political

quick fix; instead of cleaning up environmental and other problems, they dole out large campaign contributions to get legislators to write loopholes that allow them to continue business as usual.

These problems stem from a system of corporate governance that fails to hold top corporate managers accountable. In theory, executives are hired by boards of directors charged to carry out the will of the shareholders. But with tens of millions of shares outstanding in these large corporations, shareholders are generally unable to exercise any significant control. As a result, corporate boards and executives develop chummy relations, lining each other's pockets and following the path of least resistance to manage the firm. They often

find it easier, for example, to merge with another huge firm than to develop new products, and such mergers make it look as though the CEO has done something to deserve extravagant compensation.

In recent years, business theorists have offered various solutions to this problem of accountability, but to the extent that these remedies have been applied, they have all managed to make matters worse. Some have advocated using the "market for corporate control."

If a firm's board and CEO are managing poorly, these theorists reason, interested investors can borrow a huge amount of money, buy up

all the shares and replace the existing management. But as everyone knows, the wave of leveraged buyouts in the last decade—predicated, ostensibly, on these principles—generally had disastrous results. Newly acquired firms were among the most aggressive in downsizing, since they had to squeeze out every available dollar in order to pay back the huge debt generated in the takeover. Often this meant sacrificing critical expenditures for research and development and new plant and equipment, even as the architects of these takeovers bought corporate jets and Parisian condos. To make matters worse, the very threat of these takeovers

The best way to ensure corporate accountability is to extend democracy into the boardroom.

forced other firms to be much more attentive to the value of their own stock, since higher stock prices helped to fend off takeovers. In recent years, the most expedient means to boost stock prices has been to announce plans to eliminate even more jobs.

Other management theorists have advocated measures to “align” the interests of top executives with those of the shareholders, such as giving executives the right to buy thousands of the company’s shares at a discount. Such largesse, they reasoned, would encourage managers to run the firm as if they owned it. But stock-option compensation has only served to accelerate the obscene growth in executive pay and to encourage even more layoffs designed to please Wall Street. CEOs now understand that if they raise average share prices by, say, \$10 on 100 million shares outstanding, they can claim credit for creating \$1 billion of additional value. With those kinds of results, why should anybody begrudge them an annual salary of \$30 million? It’s just 3 percent of all the new wealth they allegedly created.

Still other theorists have encouraged large institutional investors such as mutual funds and pension funds to play a more active role in monitoring the firms in which they hold shares. But the managers of these funds also feel continuous pressure to show higher returns than their competitors, and they tend to use their clout to prod firms to increase their quarterly profits.

In short, all of the so-called solutions advanced by management theorists only reinforce the tendency of corporate boards and CEOs to focus on the short term. To make matters worse, the growing political clout of corporations has undermined the only remaining mechanism for holding corporations accountable—government regulations. A generation ago, most corporations understood that they needed to follow certain rules—that civil society bound them to respect laws protecting workers, consumers and the environment. But as both political parties trip over each other to raise additional campaign funds, this idea seems to have been largely forgotten. Congress continually threatens to gut much of the remaining regulatory legislation, and agencies find it more difficult to enforce remaining regulations as their budgets are cut.

The widely shared aversion to regulation has flourished largely thanks to the dominant role of free-market ideology in contemporary political debate. Free-market ideologues have mobilized a powerful set of economic metaphors that distort and narrow debate before it begins. One of the most powerful of these metaphors likens market competition to natural selection in evolutionary theory: It is supposed to be a nearly perfect mechanism to force corporations to adapt in the most efficient ways possible. Just as in nature species that fail to adapt will disappear, so, too, will corporations that fail to respond to changing markets. Following this logic, those corporations that have survived must have adapted well—they must be highly efficient. Likewise, government intervention, being inherently wasteful and ineffi-

cient, interferes with the natural workings of the private economy and saps it of its lifeblood, money capital. If the government could be forced to curb its appetite for spending, more money capital would become available to fuel the growth of those efficient firms in the private economy.

This metaphorical understanding of the economy offers an appealingly simple way to think about economic life. But it is, of course, deeply misleading. Even in competitive markets, private firms often hold on to highly inefficient practices for years or decades at a time. In fact, no automatic process ensures that these large firms remain efficient—particularly when those who manage the firms are not effectively controlled by the shareholders. And just as in nature, survival in the marketplace can result from good fortune rather than efficient adaptation. Moreover, in contemporary economies technological innovation and a skilled labor force are even more essential to the vitality of the economy than flows of money capital. Finally, to equate government intervention with interference obscures the multiple and essential roles that government must play to make a market economy work. The decline of parts of the former Soviet economy into organized gangsterism certainly illustrates the huge difference between simply encouraging commercial activity and building a productive economy.

But this deeply misleading myth of the market increasingly holds sway across the mainstream political spectrum. It diverts attention from problems that need to be addressed, such as corporate governance, while shifting attention to secondary or phony issues such as the federal budget deficit and so-called excessive regulation. Even the Clinton administration’s most progressive voice, Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, operates within these confines. He proposes to reward those firms that treat their employees decently by lowering their corporate taxes. But such a policy would yield only illusory benefits, since corporate tax rates are already extremely low in comparison to those levied in earlier decades and to the rates at which our major trading partners tax their corporations.

The remarkable appeal of the free-market myth reflects not only the ability of corporate interests to influence both politics and the broader culture but also the political left’s signal failure to challenge it intellectually. For more than a century the left-right divide has been structured around a simplistic dichotomy: The right has argued for less government and more reliance on markets, while the left has insisted on the need for more government and less use of markets.

By now, however, it should be obvious that any complex society requires the extensive use of both government and markets to structure economic decisions. This means that the left should stand not for more government but for finding a way to combine markets and government that contributes to realizing our historic values—a society based on equality, democracy and liberty. Rather than trying to minimize the role of markets, we should try to reconstruct them to realize such goals as greater gender and racial equality,

environmental protection and improved employment conditions and living standards for working people.

The problem is not that corporations pursue profits, but that they often do so in ways that impose unfair costs on other groups—consumers, neighbors, producers of raw materials or their own employees. The trick is to develop mechanisms that encourage efficient—and socially responsible—production while discouraging what economists call the “externalization” of the costs of production to consumers, the environment, workers, etc. Government regulation is one such mechanism. Imposing penalties can discourage firms from producing unsafe products, endangering the health and safety of workers, fouling the environment or bribing foreign officials to overlook violations of their own laws. But even under the best circumstances, regulators are likely to catch only a fraction of all violators.

A more promising approach is to reconfigure corporate governance. Instead of the current system, in which shareholders choose the entire board of directors, corporate law could be rewritten to create more diversified boards. (This would also require shifting from state incorporation of firms to federal incorporation, so that firms would no longer be able to shop for the friendliest system of state legal rules.) For example, the shareholders might elect 35 percent of the board—seven members out of a 20-person board. Employees might choose another 35 percent, or seven members, in open and contested elections. The final six members, or 30 percent, would be elected by a number of other constituencies—such as consumers, suppliers, bondholders and representatives of local communities.

The key idea is that no single constituency would be able to control the board by itself. Representatives of different groups would have to hear each other out and reach compromises on key policies, such as imposing costs on other groups, wage levels, staffing levels, executive compensation and short-term vs. long-term objectives. This reform would not instantly eliminate all abuses of corporate power, but it would create a useful framework to shift corporate production toward greater efficiency and away from social recklessness.

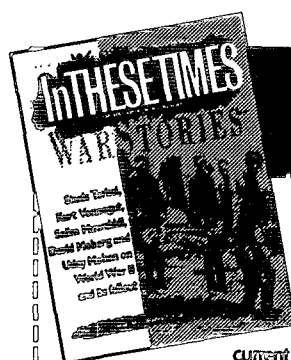
Just as important, this reform would go a long way toward solving the problems of accountability. Since these newly configured boards would include significant representation of the non-rich, they would more likely balk at huge compensation packages for top executives and support investment in the firm's existing labor force. Employee representatives would also dramatically increase the board's day-to-day knowledge of how the firm was being run and give it a tighter rein on the CEOs. They would also find it easier to resist financial markets. Even if a hostile investor group bought up all the firm's shares, it still would not take full control of the board. Hence, the firm would be in a stronger position to concentrate on the long-term goal of producing profits by creating goods and services that people actually need.

Over time, this new structure would give the firm's

employees much greater voice in corporate decision-making. The recent successes of such employee-owned firms as United Airlines demonstrate that firms operating under these new rules could more efficiently meet the needs of both employees and consumers. But firms with a more democratic, diversified board are actually preferable to employee ownership because the employees don't have to risk their retirement pay in order to gain an effective voice in governing the firm.

Obviously, it would take a powerful political movement to implement this kind of reform. But citizens already understand that the large corporation—the dominant institution in our society—is dangerously sick. Even “expert” opinion has begun to recognize that if something is not done to cure the illness, productive activity will be overwhelmed by new and ever dangerous waves of financial manipulation. Moreover, the idea of resolving the tension between economic and political power by extending democracy into the corporation itself has deep roots in American culture and politics. There is no better reminder of this than seeing the rhetoric of 19th-century republicanism and populism coming out of the mouth of Pat Buchanan. It seems quite possible that if the electorate were offered a real populist politics with a serious program for reforming the corporation, the response might be far better than any of us even dare imagine. ◀

Fred Block is a professor of sociology at the University of California, Davis and author of the upcoming book *The Vampire State* (The New Press).



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I N T H E A R T S

The weird,
weird West

N

o one can accuse Jim Jarmusch of pandering to the multiplex with *Dead Man*. It's a Western, released just as the recent boomlet in Westerns has settled back into its Boot Hill grave. It's in black-and-white (gorgeously shot by cinematographer Robby Müller). And it flaunts its allegorical ambitions.

Of course, *Dead Man* does have grisly violence, a trendy film accessory thanks to Mr. Tarantino, and it does have stars. But the violence is most unappetizing, and the stars are not the kind that burn up the box office. Johnny Depp may still be a teen heartthrob, but he is also the young actor with the most impressively uncommercial taste in Hollywood, choosing to work with visionary directors in strange roles that make his career indescribable. Even his recent (unsuccessful) attempt at an

action movie, *Nick of Time*, was a little off the beaten path. And in *Dead Man* he plays an accountant from Cleveland, whose name is William Blake.

Blake, dressed in a suit that might have graced W.C. Fields or the Mad Hatter, is a young man going west in the 1870s—despite doom-laden warnings from soot-encrusted Crispin Glover on the train—to the ugly little town of Machine. Blake has been hired by the even uglier Dickinson Metalworks, the town's main employer. However, the job has been whisked away from him, as he discovers upon arriving in Machine.

This blank Blake embarks on a series of close encounters—with Robert Mitchum (!) as the bizarre head of the metalworks and with a seller of paper flowers named Thel (Mili Avital), whose name, with its reference to the poet Blake's work, is one of the reasons *Dead Man* will prove diverting to academic trivia buffs for years to come. These manifestations of destiny propel Blake onto a horrific and picaresque journey where tygers burning bright would be the least of his wor-

ries in the forest of the night.

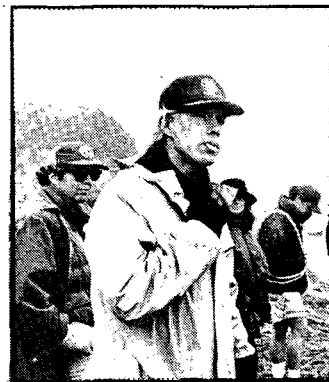
Accused of murder, Blake is tracked by a trio of preternaturally enthusiastic killers and crosses paths with a trio of animal-like trappers and skinners (including Iggy Pop in drag), who seem right out of a Peckinpah-era "dirty Western." He is saved by a big, exasperated Native American wraith named Nobody. Gary Farmer, who memorably starred in Jonathan Wacks' underrated 1989 film *Powwow Highway*, walks off with the movie here just as easily as he did then.

"It's strange that you don't remember any of your poetry," he remarks to Jarmusch's baffled Blake, and Depp settles back into the long stare that is his character's prime attitude. Depp doesn't really have much to do here but register with deadpan calmness the absurdity of one damn thing after another—which is a definition of life in some books. But Farmer, as the Indian in the ill-fitting mythic headdress of the white imagination (complete with hallucinatory visions out of Carlos Castañeda), is an active presence that enlivens the story.

There are more deaths, of course, and the kind of telling anachronisms so

Jim Jarmusch provides an ambitious—and uneven—allegory on the American West.

By Pat Dowell



Dead Man
Directed by
Jim Jarmusch

PHOTO: CHRISTINE PARRY



avored by elegiac Westerns of 20 or even 40 years ago—such as an autograph seeker—but eventually *Dead Man* heads into unknown territory, as William Blake and his guide glide through the wilderness of America toward a spirit city.

Considering the title, *Dead Man* may well be the story of a soul's passage into oblivion. And since Jarmusch has used America's founding myth—the West—and one of the cinema's most elemental forms—the Western—it's tempting to think that the moribund entity of the title is mythic America itself, or perhaps the cinema on its hundredth anniversary.

Either interpretation casts a different light on the film's genuinely yucky scenes of violence, particularly those perpetrated by the demonic hired gun that Lance Henriksen plays with his inimitable *joie de mort*. Henriksen is something of a cult actor along the Quentin Tarantino-Sam Raimi axis of delirious postmodern surrender to consumer culture, and he played a dandified gunfighter in Raimi's 1995 Western, *The Quick and the Dead*. In *Dead Man* he can be seen chomping on a human arm and hand beside the campfire, and, even

more disgustingly, slowly bringing his boot down on a corpse's head until it bursts like a melon. In close-up.

Either Jarmusch has decided to join Tarantino's wild bunch, or this is his way of dramatizing the rotten and cannibalistic nature of so much popular culture in the '90s—especially movies. But even if it's the latter, Jarmusch can be said to be playing along, even if only to comment on the game. It will take more than one viewing to make up my mind—which, I suppose, is why I like *Dead Man* one minute, then in the next find myself thinking it's a pretentious dud.

What makes *Dead Man* so unyielding to easy interpretation is Jarmusch's trademark weirdness. His enthusiasm for the odder rhythms of conversations and events, for the unabashedly symbolic character, for the beautiful image coupled to obscure meanings—in short, his eagerness to suggest that below the surface of what we see lie other worlds and other dramas (a characteristic of William Blake's work as well—these things make *Dead Man* seem bigger than the simple question of whether it's a good movie or not. It's an *interesting* movie, and perhaps in our age of innocence and experience, that matters more. ◀

I N P R I N T

Is progressive education growing up?

By Gerald Graff

It's been said that some of America's raging arguments over culture and politics are the equivalent of blowing a car horn in a traffic jam. Frustrated at social and cultural problems that seem increasingly deep-rooted and hopeless, many succumb to the natural tendency to lean on the horn, as if to say, "This problem would clear up if everybody would just get out of the way and listen to me!" Discussions of education are peculiarly susceptible to this horn-blowing species of cultural criticism, for educational problems look deceptively simple yet have a maddening way of coming back to haunt us.

Encouragement can therefore be taken at the success of Deborah Meier's recent book, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem*, which injects down-to-earth intelligence into a debate on education dominated by pomposity, posturing, apoplectic pronouncements, vapid nostalgia and anti-intellectualism of the left and right. The book describes how Meier and a group of associate teachers have transformed the Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) into a challenging intellectual environment that has proved remarkably effective in educating "disadvantaged students" (a term her students reject, as she notes).

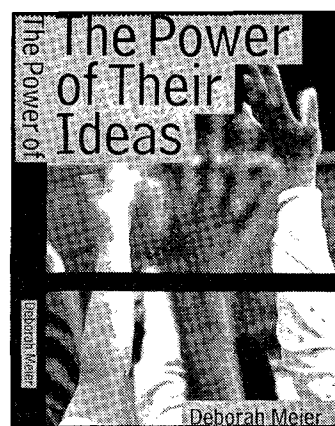
Meier's thinking is solidly in the left-progressive tradition. She sees "democratic community" as "the non-negotiable purpose of good schooling," which should train students to enter into their culture's "political conversation across divisions of race, class, religion and ideology." She has no use for conservative nostalgia, pointing out that despite standard perceptions that the performance of American students has precipitously declined, "the average American did not graduate from high school" prior to World War II, much less attain the high standards of literacy that are now fondly imagined to have been achieved in those days of yore. She is sympathetic with the more sensible multicultural and feminist innovations in the curriculum. She takes for granted the

Deweyan principle that any teaching will be futile that fails to start from where the student already is.

Yet Meier rejects the perverse corollary of this principle, highly favored in progressive circles today, which holds that students will learn only if their teachers efface their authority, or—as an eminent professor I heard recently put it, "We teachers have to get ourselves out of the way so that our students can learn." Non-white teachers and parents are rightly frustrated, according to Meier, at progressive educators' "seeming avoidance of 'direct' instruction"—i.e., teaching—"as though if we waited long enough, children would discover everything on their own." She observes that many African-American teachers and parents now see progressive education as a "cop-out, a way of avoiding, not confronting, the challenge" of actually teaching kids something. She writes of seeing "children being driven into dumbness by a failure to challenge their curiosity, to build on their natural drive toward competitiveness." In refreshing contrast, Meier and the CPESS have operated on the assumption that "adults had important things to teach children, not just a mission to get out of their way."

Meier's book, appearing at the same time as Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (The New Press), which makes similar criticisms of romantic progressivism, suggests that we may be seeing the beginning of a long-overdue reaction within progressive educational circles against the self-defeating equation of serious intellectual standards with oppressive dominant ideology. Other developments on the current scene give one hope that Meier's and Delpit's books will turn out to be part of a broader renewal of progressive education away from the doctrinaire and the touchy-feely toward intellectually challenging curricula. Since the publication in 1985 of the path-breaking book *The Shopping Mall High School*, by Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar and David Cohen, a new breed of democratic educator has arisen that refuses to cede the idea of intellectual standards to the cultural right. I think particularly of TheodoreSizer, in *Horace's Compromise*, and Howard Gardner, in *The Unschooled Mind*. It seems significant that both Sizer (through his influential high school network, the Coalition of Essential Schools) and Gardner (through the ATLAS Project at Harvard) are deeply engaged in practical educational reform as well as scholarship and theory.

What makes Meier's



**The Power of Their Ideas:
Lessons for America from a
Small School in Harlem**

By Deborah Meier

Beacon Press

190 pp., \$20

book a refreshing change from rightist nostalgia and leftist self-indulgence is Meier's clear-headed insistence that education should challenge students intellectually. Viewed in this light, the ubiquitous current debates over which texts to teach and even which ideas to promote only distract us from this goal. After all, what difference will it make whether schools assign *Hamlet* or *The Color Purple* if students have to resort to *Cliffs Notes* either way? When students flounder on such assignments, their problem lies less in the choice of texts than in the intellectualized ways of reading, thinking and talking about the texts that are valued (or should be valued) in school. In short, Meier believes that the point of education is to turn students into *intellectuals*, a category not to be confused with mini-academics or narrow specialists or people unfit for practical vocations. "We might even want all our young people to be intellectuals ... beauticians and plumbers as well as lawyers and doctors. CPSS' strategy [is to put] all our young people in a position to explore the fundamental social issues of their times." An unrealistic goal? Not at a time when an information-centered economy increasingly punishes those who lack analytic and critical thinking skills—and when seemingly practical specializations become obsolete within a decade.

Meier writes of a student whose revelatory moment comes when he hears an older student say, "I have a theory about why...." That, she says, is "how we at CPSS define being well educated: getting in the habit of developing theories that can be articulated clearly and checked out in a thoughtful way." Meier defines a good school as an apprenticeship into "learning to say 'I've got a theory!' Somehow, somewhere, young people need to join, if only part-time, the club we belong to. That's more important than the particulars of what they learn."

Meier understands what today's horn-blowing education critics invariably miss—that this kind of intellectual habit of thought can't be induced merely by more school discipline or less, or by making the texts more traditional or more trendy. Reducing the educational problem to the choice of texts to be taught or teaching methods to be used ignores the larger intellectual culture of the school or college, which is the factor likely to determine the extent to which students will be likely to adopt an intellectualizing attitude at all. Meier sees that it takes a "strong school culture" to overcome the anti-intellectual influence students are normally exposed to. Her crucial insight is that becoming a "literate" person means joining a "club," changing one's whole social affiliation and the way one thinks about one's self, something rarely brought about by mere exposure to certain

books or ideas or certain "cultural literacy" facts.

Meier explains that most students resist membership in the club of intellectuals—"either out of fear of rejection or because to join such a club means to reject their own community or peer clubs. Or because they just don't 'get it' yet, or 'who wants it!'" Schools and universities that fail usually do so because the teachers themselves do not belong to the intellectual "club," or because the curriculum represents the intellectual club confusingly, chopping it up into so many disconnected courses and discourses that its underlying continuities of argumentation are obscured. Creating a strong school culture that will act as an intellectual counterculture calls for an integrated curriculum, then, which is what Central Park East has developed, by connecting philosophy, history and social thought and, above all, the arguments and debates in these subjects that can interest students.

In other words, Meier argues that an intellectually stimulating school culture is not just the result of individual acts of good teaching; it takes organization and teamwork and a connected curriculum. In fact, the sentimental cult of the passionate, committed teacher—which assumes that education would improve if only teachers *cared* more—has done much to retard the cause of educational reform. Our obsessive focus on the breakthroughs achieved by individual teachers obscures a central truth: In order to be effective, teachers need to work together in a team effort, constructing an intellectual community that students will want to join. At Central Park East, this community of parents as well as teachers is based as much on debate and difference as on consensus. Meier

observes that "because our adult debates are not hidden from our students, there is no sharp dividing line between 'staff development' activities and student activities." A "climate of diversity and disagreement" arises that "becomes enormously powerful over time" and draws students in.

This crucial point was badly missed by an article last year in the *New York Times Magazine* that celebrated Meier's work, but reduced it to the cliché that "smallness is the answer"—i.e., just shrink the size of schools and classes, and all will be well. Meier does argue that school units can be effective only when kept to a manageably small size. But her whole emphasis is on organization and integration, not on smallness for its own sake. The romantic belief that small is beautiful in education, like the romantic cult of the great solo teacher, is yet another of the sentimental banalities that continue to distract us from the real problems of education. Meier's book does a real service in bringing us back to those problems and pointing a promising way to their solution. ◀ Gerald Graff is Pullman Professor of English and Education at the University of Chicago and author of *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (W.W. Norton).



Border kvetchings

By Scott Sherman

Matthew Cooper recently published an op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* entitled "Carlos, We Hardly Knew Ye," a sardonic reflection on the "brief glory" and subsequent eclipse of Carlos Salinas, who, practically overnight, went from being "one of the great men of the 20th century" (in *The Economist's* august estimation) to the most ridiculed president in recent Mexican history. Hounded out of Mexico, Salinas is now reported to be living comfortably in Ireland, and the country he led is in shambles.

It will be a long time, if ever, before we have a full account of the events of 1994 that precipitated Salinas' fall: the Chiapas revolt, the murders of Luis Donaldo Colosio and José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, the carefully orchestrated election that brought Ernesto Zedillo to power and the collapse of the Mexican economy following the devaluation of the peso in December. *Bordering On Chaos*, an absorbing journalistic account, revisits these events in an attempt to make sense of them. It is a task that has so far defied the best efforts of some of Mexico's most accomplished journalists, so it is perhaps not surprising that Oppenheimer's own well-intentioned but heavily anecdotal narrative contains numerous defects.

Nevertheless, Oppenheimer, the senior Latin America correspondent for the *Miami Herald* and the author of a recent book on Cuba—the unfortunately titled *Castro's Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba*—is an energetic reporter who has scrutinized a vast amount of information, much of it murky. At the very least, *Bordering on Chaos* shows that Bush and Clinton backed the wrong side in Mexico, and the book is a powerful indictment of U.S. policy toward its southern neighbor as well as a stinging rebuke to men like Henry Kissinger, who, writing in the *Washington Post* in 1993, said of Salinas' team: "I know of no government anywhere that is more competent."

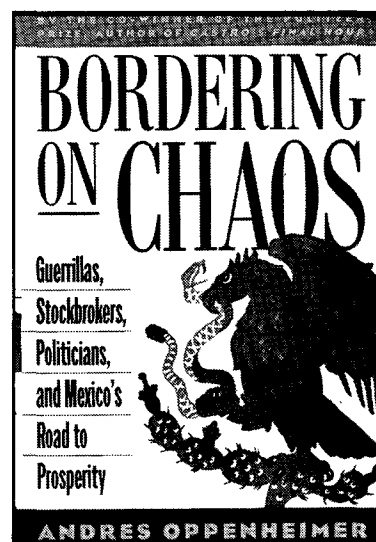
Oppenheimer has undertaken countless interviews with Mexico's elite, and *Bordering on Chaos* vividly reconstructs the most sordid episodes of the Salinas era, including the infamous banquet of February 23, 1993, when the president summoned 30 of the country's wealthiest men—many of whom had benefited handsomely from government privatization policies—to the ritzy Mexico City neigh-

borhood of Polanco. Salinas prevailed upon the assembled supporters to contribute \$25 million each to the PRI's reelection campaign. By the end of the evening, Salinas had collected pledges of about \$750 million, but news of the dinner soon leaked to the press, and a political firestorm immediately ensued.

The book's finest chapter, "The Accidental Candidate," recounts how Zedillo, a taciturn, relatively unknown member of Salinas' inner circle, was selected to replace the murdered Colosio. After the assassination, Salinas had to scramble for a replacement, but strict constitutional requirements put severe limits on his choice. He had two possibilities: PRI president Fernando Ortiz Arana, a party bureaucrat, or Zedillo, who had managed Colosio's campaign. With conspiracy theories making the rounds, and massive capital flight looming, the president had to act quickly. Yet he was fearful the PRI's leadership would not support Zedillo, whom aides derisively referred to as a "nerd."

To the rescue came Manlio Fabio Beltrones, the governor of the northern state of Sonora and one of the PRI's shrewdest operators. A few days after Colosio's death, Beltrones informed Salinas that he had found, in his video library, a speech Colosio had given in which he praised Zedillo as a "great Mexican" and a "true patriot." Why not, Beltrones suggested, "play the tape in front of the PRI leadership and have the late Colosio himself make the nomination"? Salinas, in Oppenheimer's account, was duly convinced; and within hours PRI governors from around the country, as well as loyal government stalwarts like the grotesque 96-year-old labor leader Fidel Velázquez, would descend on the presidential palace to anoint the new candidate. It's a well-known routine, but Oppenheimer relates the details with humor and panache.

Oppenheimer also produces some lively pages on the questionable elections of 1994, the excesses of the populist-oriented National Solidarity program and the obsequiousness of the press. But there are some curious omissions here. The author is mostly silent on the economic crisis resulting from the devaluation. In exchange for a \$50 billion bailout plan fashioned by the Clinton administration



Bordering on Chaos:
Guerrillas, Stockbrokers,
Politicians, and Mexico's
Road to Prosperity
By Andres Oppenheimer
Little, Brown and Company
367 pp., \$25.95

and the IMF, the Zedillo administration was forced to institute a draconian program of "shock therapy," the results of which have been extraordinarily painful for most Mexicans. And Oppenheimer has little to say about the ongoing investigation into the murder of Luis Donaldo Colosio, although he does provide some telling anecdotes about Colosio's personality. For example, in separate interviews with Colosio and Zedillo, both of whom were educated in the United States, Oppenheimer questioned each about which aspect of American life had left the deepest impression upon him. Zedillo replied with some mild comments about Yale. Colosio recalled the protests against the Vietnam War, and the appalling racial segregation he had witnessed in Philadelphia and other large cities he had visited.

The shortcomings of Oppenheimer's approach become all too clear in his chapters on the Chiapas conflict. After just a single visit to the rebel zone, where he interviewed Subcomandante Marcos, Oppenheimer paints an unflattering picture of the Zapatista movement and its leadership. And in place of strong political analysis we get bland speculation:

[Marcos] reminded me of Lawrence of Arabia, in that he was a well-read white intellectual leading a rebellion of mostly illiterate Indians with whom he had little in common, but whose blind trust he had won through a combination of courage and wits. He shared a common political purpose with his Indian troops, but it was clear to anybody spending some time in the Zapatista camp that he must have felt lonely among them.

Marcos himself, in his conversation with Oppenheimer, contradicts this: "When we started, we did so as a small vanguard group, with the classic idea that with our example we would lead the rest," he said. "But when we started getting in touch with Indian collective societies, it was a shock. We ended up subordinating ourselves to them."

A quick perusal of Oppenheimer's footnotes indicates that his account of the origins and activities of the Zapatistas is based, in large part, on two dubious sources: Mexican intelligence reports and a controversial book by Carlos Tello Díaz entitled *La rebelión de las Cañadas*, which was heavily criticized by the Mexican left and which Marcos himself referred to as "simply a transcription of police files." (For a balanced account of the dispute surrounding Tello Díaz, see Peter Canby's "Icon of resistance," in the February 9, 1996 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*.)

Aside from the sections on Chiapas, Oppenheimer has nothing to say about opposition movements on the left. He does write sympathetically and at length about the conservative National Action Party (PAN), which controls 13 of the country's 20 biggest cities as well as four key states, and which stands to do very well in the 1997 mid-term election. In a recent appearance at Columbia University, Oppenheimer was asked why a 367-page account of Mexican politics in the 1990s contains only five brief references to the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). He replied that

the PRD has little support beyond Mexico City's bohemian cafes and bookstores, and that the party does not represent "the real Mexico."

The PRD finished a distant third in the August 1994 elections—in part because it spent a mere \$3 million, compared to the PRI's campaign outlay of at least \$700 million. And in recent years the party has been wracked by infighting and factionalism. Still, since 1988 it has been at the forefront of hundreds of grass-roots struggles involving land redistribution, workers' rights and environmental protection. In the course of these battles the party has incurred more than 300 fatalities, a number that grows larger each passing month.

In the beleaguered southern state of Tabasco, for example, the PRD is now trying to dislodge PRI Gov. Roberto Madrazo, who, as we now know, spent an astonishing \$70 million to win a 1994 gubernatorial election in which barely 500,000 people voted. In February, 40,000 Chontal Indians, backed by the PRD, blocked 60 of Pemex's oil wells in protest against the company's destruction of Tabasco's land and water supply. Madrazo, in turn, stepped up his "dirty war" against the PRD and its allies, a war that the U.S. media has not seen fit to cover. Oppenheimer, true to the spirit of "objective" journalism, appears to be indifferent to these grass-roots conflicts, even though they are an essential element of the country's political landscape. If he believes the PRD is nothing more than a contingent of café intellectuals, it would behoove him to travel to the PRD strongholds of Tabasco, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Chiapas and, particularly, Guerrero, where an autocratic governor, Rubén Figueroa, was recently forced to resign—largely as a result of constant pressure from PRD activists.

The book concludes with some gloomy sentiments from Octavio Paz, who foresees a future of violence and dictatorship unless political reform is quickly implemented. Oppenheimer, too, is cynical: In his view, Wall Street and the PRI have learned little from the last two years, and consequently another financial disaster, which is to say another taxpayer-funded bailout, is now in the making.

In 1981, long before Ernesto Zedillo offered his country's oil revenues as collateral for a multibillion-dollar bailout package, Mexico's future was oddly foreshadowed in a series of articles in the pro-government newspaper *Excelsior*, which Oppenheimer has rescued from the archives. They were written by a young Harvard-educated official named Carlos Salinas, who took on Mexico's Milton Friedman, the economist Luis Pazos. "His persistent effort to corrode the base of the current state and replace it with a free market 'laissez faire' system," warned Salinas, "can only lead to the formation of a repressive and authoritarian system." The future president concluded: "History has proven that the social cost of the free market and the extreme individualism that [Pazos] proposes has been exploitation, neo-colonialism and the loss of national independence." ◀

Scott Sherman writes frequently on Mexican affairs.

Blood simple

By K.E. Fleming

Western culture is a bloody business, both literally and figuratively. American mass culture is still steeped in a veritable tidal wave of blood and retribution, from the ironic cinematic stylings of Quentin Tarantino and Richard Rodriguez to the lurid fictions of Thomas Harris and Ann Rice. But our own bloody obsessions have a still older pedigree, in which blood holds a spiritual—and often aesthetic—place of privilege. Consider, for example, an early 17th-century etching that depicts one of Europe's most historically popular methods of execution, that of "breaking on a wheel." This technique involved the breaking of all the victim's joints and bones with the firm blow of an iron mace, so that his limbs might be "braided"—woven, reed-like, between the spokes of a large wooden wheel.

Jacques Callot's 1633 engraving features one such wretched specimen, heaped formlessly upon a wheel atop an elevated platform in the midst of a crowded square. Also on the platform, flanking the victim on either side, are two figures. On the left is the executioner, arms raised high, metal club in hand. On the right, stooped over the victim's head, stands a priest in ecclesiastical hat and robe. In his hand is a cross, which he solicitously holds directly before the dying victim's eyes, so that the victim might, even in the midst of bloody death, be given the chance of repentance and eternal life.

To the modern observer this juxtaposition seems intentionally wry, to say the least. To see blood and guts and gore so clearly linked with Christianity (and its ostensible message of peace and life and love) appears ironic, and one suspects that Callot intended it as such.

Perhaps, however, this is not the case. For is Christianity itself not predicated on precisely such a paradox? That is an argument that would seem to be corroborated by Piero Camporesi's *Juice of Life*. The book is a brief examination of how both Medieval and early Enlightenment thought closely linked life and the shedding of blood. Camporesi examines the elaboration of this theme primarily through the words of the church and its representatives. Their language, as he demonstrates in decisive and overpowering fashion, was for centuries quite blood-soaked. Here, for example, is the great Saint Catherine of Siena, exhorting her nuns:

Drown ... in the blood of Christ crucified, and bathe in his blood and become drunk with his blood, and sate yourselves

with blood and clothe yourselves with blood. And once more I would fain go clad in blood. ... I will have blood, and in blood have I satisfied and shall satisfy my soul: ... so that, in time of solicitude, I would go washed in blood, and thus I shall find blood and creatures, and I shall drink their affection and love in blood.

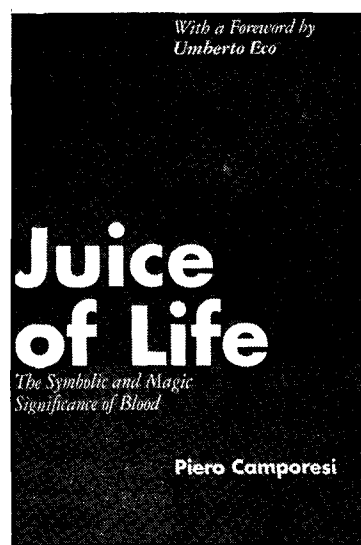
Such evocations of blood as soothing, cleansing, loving and pure were at odds with the apocalyptic visions of many of Catherine's contemporaries. In 1513, Francesco da Montepulciano predicted an imminent apocalypse: "There will be blood everywhere. There will be blood in the streets, and blood in the rivers, filled to overflowing, lakes of blood, rivers of blood. ..."

Montepulciano, while awash in the blood of holy retribution, retains the fundamental Christian message of life and love, for it is, after all, only through the apocalypse that the new age of Christ's reign might begin.

One begins to see just how easily such rhetoric of blood and redemption might easily translate, with no irony whatsoever, into the penal realm. Callot's engraving, then, is perhaps not so much a commentary on the relationship of late Medieval Christian thought to blood as a more or less direct representation of it.

Camporesi is, in the words of Umberto Eco's introduction, "a cultural anthropologist ... [who] reads literary texts." He is a sort of social historian, whose fieldwork consists not of visits to a foreign land but rather to a foreign time. This anthropological, rather than strictly historical, approach accounts for Camporesi's heavy use of primary texts, and his virtually absolute disregard for secondary ones—with the exception of one quick reference to the cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas. *Juice of Life* does not attempt in any way to engage with the by now huge corpus of theoretical literature concerned with the historical and social construction of the human body. Instead, Camporesi packs his book with lengthy and often discomfitingly lurid and blood-filled excerpts from the European Middle Ages.

Camporesi has an eye for the intriguing text. His total lack of explanation, however, can make



Juice of Life: The Symbolic and Magic Significance of Blood
By Piero Camporesi
Translated by Robert R. Barr
Continuum
139 pp., \$17.95

for frustrating reading. Camporesi's method of presentation can be disjointed and jarring; his quotations and case studies often seem to add up to an exhibition of unlabeled curios at some grotesque sideshow exhibit, linked together only by their shared fascination with blood and its many properties. This device, given Camporesi's estimable scholarly reputation, may be deliberate. It does, at any rate, bring the reader into immediate and visceral contact with the matter at hand: After reading too many pages at once, one's head swims with Kubrickesque visions of tidal waves of blood, and one's stomach turns with so much talk of bodily effluvia.

Ultimately, though, this ingenuous reading of Camporesi's intent seems too generous. And, in any case, it does not matter. For whether it exists by error or design, *Juice of Life's* interpretive silence leaves too many questions unanswered. What, one wonders, does all this mean? What can be said, both from a social and an intellectual point of view, about our forbears' and our own evident obsession with the substance that runs within our veins?

Tantalizingly, Camporesi gives some hints, but never works them up into an argument. Instead, his most lucid attempts at commentary and interpretation come in the final pages of *Juice of Life*, in which he considers the unique role of women within the sanguinary sphere. He trenchantly (if not with great originality) shows that Woman stands, in the anxious male sexuality of Christendom, as analog to blood, for both are understood as simultaneously life-giving and

dangerous: both are alluring yet repulsive.

Moreover, Camporesi suggests that Woman, who is regularly cleansed of "excess blood" by menstruation, emerges in late Medieval thought as more intelligent and powerful than Man. Again, however, such observations are more teasing than conclusive and, alas, have the faint ring of wishful thinking rather than true conviction. What, for instance, are we to make of the ample evidence—also contained in Camporesi's book—that Woman is the filthiest and most base of creatures? If menstrual blood nourishes the fetus in the womb, consider, too, its lethal powers. In the words of Innocent III, "Nothing is more monstrous than women's menstruation."

The by now somewhat hackneyed assertion of Woman's simultaneous strength and weakness in Western history and intellectual life doesn't really serve to engage fully this sort of rabid misogyny. And certainly when viewed in contrast with St. Catherine's beatific vision of the blood of suffering, a great deal of this new vision of the exterminating power of blood—and women—needs to be disentangled and explained. But this requires the development of a careful analytical framework.

The result of Camporesi's effort is finally not dissimilar to Callot's engraving: We watch, appalled, but are not urged to understand the blood lust that we see. We are titillated and repulsed, but the stuff of understanding still eludes us. ◀

K.E. Fleming teaches history at Loyola-Marymount University.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS GARY LAMB, DAN RHODES, JERRY TUCKER, and DICK SCHABLE on behalf of themselves and others similarly situated, Plaintiffs, vs. CITY OF DECATUR; Decatur Police Lieutenant RICHARD RYAN, Sergeant JAMES CHERVINKO and others whose identities are yet unknown to Plaintiffs, Defendants. No. 95-2167 NOTICE OF PENDENCY OF CLASS ACTION AND OF RIGHTS OF CLASS MEMBERS to: All the women, men and children who were exposed to the pepper gas used by City of Decatur police and other law enforcement officers during the gathering on June 25, 1994, at A.E. Staley's 21st Street gate. Notice is hereby given to you that the plaintiffs above named have filed a suit in the above entitled United States District Court in behalf of themselves and all members of the class herein addressed. By order dated March 8, 1996, the court in this action determined that the action should be maintained as a class action under the provisions of Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, and direct the giving of this notice of class members.

Notice is further given as follows: 1. The plaintiffs' complaint alleges violations of federal law on the part of the above named defendants which they contend caused damage to the class, for which recovery is sought herein, in that they sprayed pepper gas at and sent pepper gas wafting into a crowd of women, men and children comprising a peaceful gathering to mark the one-year anniversary of the lockout of A.E. Staley workers, thereby using force beyond that permitted by the U.S. Constitution and state law. Defendants have denied any wrongdoing and have denied any liability to plaintiffs or any member of the class. This notice is not to be construed as an expression of any opinion by the court with respect to the merits of the claims or defenses of the parties. This notice and the attached "Exclusion Request" are sent merely to advise you of the pendency of the action and the rights which you have with respect to it. 2. The court will exclude any member of the class on written request for such exclusion, postmarked on or before July 1, 1996. Persons who request such exclusion will not be entitled to share in the benefits of the judgment if it is favorable to plaintiff and will not be bound by the judgment if it is adverse to the plaintiffs. All requests for exclusion should be mailed by first class mail or delivered to the Clerk of the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois, at 201 South Vine Street, Suite 218, Urbana, IL 61801. A form and envelope for this purpose are enclosed with each of these notices given to individual class members and may also be secured from the clerk. All class members who fail to return the exclusion form above referred to in the manner and within the time specified above will automatically be included in this action as members of the class represented by plaintiffs. 3. All members of the class who do not request exclusion as prescribed in the preceding paragraph, and who are, therefore, deemed to have elected to participate in this action, will be entitled to share pro rata in the benefits of any judgment

favorable to the class or in any settlement of their claims, after deduction of attorney fees and disbursements, but they will also be bound by any judgment unfavorable to the class. Included class members will also be subject to the order and notices hereafter given in this action with reference to the furnishing of statements and other matters of that nature. 4. If any class member does not desire to be excluded but does wish to appear in his own behalf, such class member may enter an appearance through counsel of her or his own choosing. All members who do not request exclusion or who do not enter an appearance through counsel of their own choosing will be represented by plaintiffs through their counsel hereinafter named. 5. Counsel for the plaintiffs and for the members of the class included in this action are Marshall Susler, whose address is Moore, Susler, McNutt and Wrigley, 3071 N. Water St., Decatur, IL 62526, and whose telephone number is 217/872-1600; Jan Susler, whose address is the People's Law Office, 1180 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60622, and whose telephone number is 312/235-0070; and Michael Deutsch, whose address is the Center for Constitutional Rights, 666 Broadway, 7th floor, New York, NY 10012, and whose telephone number is 212/614-6427. All communications and questions concerning this notice should be sent to the attorneys named and should not be addressed to the clerk of this court. 6. If the address of any class member changes or is different from the address stated on the envelope enclosing this notice, advice concerning such change or a correction should be sent by mail to the attorneys above named. 7. This court has retained jurisdiction in this action to correct, modify, annul, vacate, or supplement its order determining that this cause shall be maintained as a class action at any time before the trial of this action or the decision on the merits herein as the case may be.

8. The pleadings and other papers filed in this action are available for inspection in the office of the clerk of this court. REQUEST FOR EXCLUSION Read the enclosed Legal Notice carefully before filling out this form.

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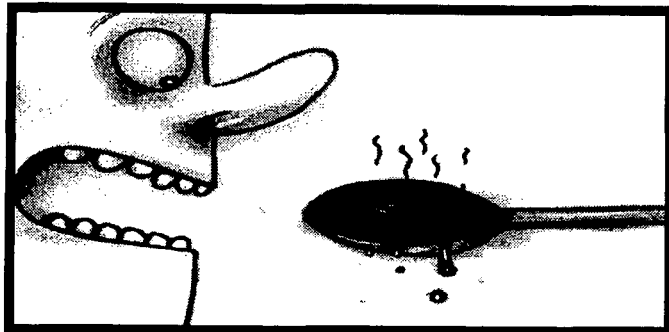
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SPEED READING



**Toxic Sludge Is Good for You:
Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry**
By John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton
Common Courage Press
240 pp., \$16.95

To judge from today's self-aware, irony-laden advertising campaigns, Americans appear to have assumed a sort of reflexive incredulousness. Indeed, our media-saturated culture seems to have hardened this attitude into a cynicism that, despite entreaties not to "believe the hype," rarely musters more than a grumbling passivity. Perhaps nothing illustrates this sorry state of affairs better than the abiding success of the \$10 billion-a-year public relations industry, which, despite its axiomatic mendacity, shapes the terms of almost all public debate.

As John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton demonstrate in their new book, *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You*, successful PR is more a matter of displacing journalists than persuading them. Public relations flacks, and the "press agents" that were their forerunners, have long usurped the opinion-making role of the press by largely doing journalists' work for them, serving as handy news sources and de facto copywriters. Economies of scale imposed by media conglomeration have only exacerbated the excesses of this grand tradition. Desperate to slash overhead, many smaller local television stations willingly run the "video news releases" PR firms produce and distribute—and often run them unedited—because they are free and they actually look like news.

Worse still, as progressive political movements have adopted more media-savvy tactics, the public relations industry has mutated apace. Stauber and Rampton detail the phony grass-roots lobbying, or "astroturf campaigns," that PR flacks orchestrate on behalf of beleaguered underdogs such as Wal-Mart, AT&T, Hewlett-Packard and the ITT-Hartford Insurance Group. Following the principle of fighting fire with fire, firms now clutter the political landscape with bogus grass-roots organizations bearing grass-roots-sounding names and acronyms. Their sophisticated mass mailings, masked by carefully variegated wording, stationery and return addresses, effectively disguise corporate propaganda as spontaneous outpourings of civic impulse.

And PR flacks manufacture consent by flooding congressional offices with "calls" they patch through from people they've called themselves and coached to deliver a desired message.

When such methods fail, however, PR firms have employed more direct approaches to silence or undermine political activists, consumer, environmental and other public-interest groups. Ketchum Communications, for example, sabotaged the book tour of David Steinman's *Diet for a Poisoned Planet* at the behest of the California Raisin Advisory Board. (Steinman's book revealed that samples of raisins have been known to contain the residue of more than 100 industrial chemicals and pesticides.)

In a similar fashion, Ketchum and Morgan and Myers PR, working on behalf of the Beef Council and the National Dairy Board, employed a series of scams and dirty tricks to scuttle the book tour for Jeremy Rifkin's *Beyond Beef*, and actually caused Prentice-Hall to reduce by half the press run of Gerard Colby's *DuPont: Behind the Nylon Curtain*.

Such chicanery should hardly seem out of character, considering the clientele major PR firms serve, particularly despotic foreign governments seeking to calm American investors and increase their U.S. foreign aid dollars. Thanks to the Sawyer/Miller group, for example, the Colombian government was able to blame its penchant for political murder on North American cocaine consumers; Patton, Boggs & Blow smoothed over the Guatemalan government's genocide campaign against its own indigenous population; and Turkey realized a handsome return on the \$1.2 million it paid Hill and Knowlton, securing \$800 million in U.S. foreign aid despite the State Department's exhaustive documentation of its government's human rights violations.

If all this sounds horrifying, it ought to. But Stauber and Rampton stop short of characterizing PR as inherently malevolent. In fact, they argue, responsible PR methods might usefully advance the causes the industry has done the most to undermine. The problem is, of course, that we do not elect PR firms, and "ordinary citizens cannot afford the multimillion-dollar campaigns that PR firms undertake on behalf of their special interest clients, usually large corporations, business associations and governments."

Stauber and Rampton, who publish the quarterly *PR Watch* and run the Center for Media and Democracy in Madison, Wis., do not declare war on the PR industry or propose regulating it, but call for citizens to become more aware of it and how it affects their lives.

Indeed, *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You* ends on an oddly optimistic note. After citing examples of expensive PR campaigns that have not worked and bona-fide, underfunded grass-roots efforts that have, Stauber and Rampton say that in a strange way PR's very existence is testimony to the power of democracy. "The fact that corporations and governments feel compelled to spend billions of dollars every year manipulating the public," they write, "is a perverse tribute to human nature and our own moral values."

—Dustin Beilke

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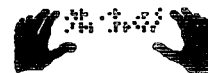
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which the differences between two (otherwise contiguous) parties are artificially dilated in the eyes of the electorate—yet leaving the real concerns facing our Common Men to escape uncounseled. These questions, in their leading nature, are on the order of someone asking you, “When did you stop whipping your shipmates?” or, “Do you favor or oppose this ship over here’s ban on grog?” and then saying, “Well, the Republicans whip, and will ban grog besides.” Plainly a crime, I say, these Democrats’ scurvey “survey” on crime.

The DNC claims in its letter to poor X6348A, “To win in 1996, we must draw a clear distinction between our Party and the Republicans,” by which I suppose they mean the platform must be distinct in its particulars, but hardly different in its *foundations*. Listen to them: “What is your opinion about Republican efforts to weaken worker health and safety regulation under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration?” Old X6348A wants to ponder the Republican National Committee’s version of same: “What is your opinion of Democratic efforts to bury small business with red tape to fatten the troughs of its goldbricking sinecure-holders?” Give no gold to Goldbrickers! Onward and upward, *lux et veritas*!

On we press. “Should the government spend more, less or about the same on the following education programs?”—“Head Start”—“Student Loans”—“Aid to colleges and universities”—“Aid to elementary and secondary education.”

Now surely rare is the Democrat who would be so assured in his self-regard that he would *sign his name* to defunding education, even if ninety-nine times of one hundred he would, in secret ballot, throw in to abate the taxes of his widget manufacture though it meant verily taking McGuffey from the hands of our youngsters. But the DNC searches not for debates from which to craft sound policy prescriptions—is not anyway the funding of education, by the main, the concern of the various states, not the federal government?—but a safe unanimity from which to craft heart-rending television commercials.

Of course, it may be protested that a party platform has always been consecrated, in our civitas, to the fashioning of such glittering and barren unanimities. Yet never have I witnessed such bald efforts to conscript unsuspecting citizens into focus groups before they offer even the barest hiccup of their own ungainly, unpackaged opinions.

Truly an education, these questions on education; notions that would not tickle the fancy of every last couch potato shan’t even be contemplated. And see here our options, as to Affirmative Action! (a) “phase out all affirmative action laws,” (b) “review affirmative action regulations and eliminate those regulations where necessary,” or (c) “oppose any effort to weaken” them. “Here’s for *strengthening* them,” wants I to say, but according to New Democrats, to countenance this possibility would be alike to hunting Leviathan without a harpoon.

Methinks this scribbler shall search the length and breadth of this 1996 Democratic Platform Poll and find no

comfort for his convictions: Where, prithee, are the queries concerning corporate responsibility? inner-city decay? sweated immigrant labor? unprecedented wage gaps between captain and crew? media mega-trusts? Washington influence peddling? Etceteras, and etceteras.

They do, though, mark a hearty concern with “Star Wars.” They declare, “To balance the budget, some cuts in government spending need to be made [nary a Keynesian among them, I daresay!]. ... For each proposal, please indicate its relative level of priority in any plan to balance the budget”—and their first option is: “Reinstating funding for the Star Wars missile defense program.” Elsewhere they ask: “Should the United States renegotiate the ABM treaty with Russia to allow deployment of a Star Wars missile defense system or should the United States continue to honor this treaty and forgo plans to develop Star Wars?”

Now, no other issue but Star Wars suffers such concern; why this? Is space-based nuclear defense the margin on which the Republic stands or falls? No, it is the margin on which the *Republicans* stand or fall.

Read the news, hearties: “Only days after the success of his quest for the Republican presidential nomination was assured, Bob Dole joined House Speaker Newt Gingrich in introducing a bill that would require the deployment of a national missile defense by the end of 2003.” Says Dole: “If this bill is passed, I hope that President Clinton will approve it. If he doesn’t approve it, President Dole will approve it.”

Avast, Dick Morris! Take your wedge, your wedge, to pierce these faint Republican hearts! By what monstrous blunder—by what misguided polling!—do these Grand Old Partymen assume American political imaginations soaring to Star Wars? These Republicans think that to tar the Democrats as anti- will elicit howls of voter outrage. Hast anyone seen the voter who cares a whit about Star Wars?

Think the Democrats’ sachems: “Republicans will look like fools, riding this rotting plank to election day”—but then they scratch their heads. “What if voters *do* care about Star Wars? What if they won’t like us anymore unless we, too, care about Star Wars? Then we must suffer concern for Star Wars! We must make sure—double sure!—whether our rank and our file do or do not suffer concern for Star Wars, before proceeding. What do you think, O Democrats, about Star Wars?—(a), (b), (c) or (d)?”

That there stalks the land such souls as I, the likes of Dick Morris shall never know, for we shall never be afforded a clear view of these New Democrats to address them; for their dictates—*Rightward, mateys! Steady to the center! Poll-results, ho!*—are ever so natural to them, by virtue of being the very medium of their political crafting, that they are as the great shroud of the sea, rolling on as it rolled five thousand years ago.

But so shall I be all the more hardened to scouring for the telltale break in the fog, dark imprecations in my heart and sharpened harpoon in my hands.

Rick Perlstein recommends the University of California’s Arion Press edition of *Moby Dick*.

Moby Dick Morris; or, The Wedge

By Rick Perlstein

Call me X6348A 603020433455. Some months ago—never mind how long precisely—the Democratic National Committee, peradventure becoming apprised of my scribblings for sundry leftward fishwraps of trifling circulation, sent me their 1996 *National Democratic Platform Poll*, and I, having little to interest me that afternoon, thought I would endeavor to speak them my mind. Whenever it is a damp, drizzly second Tuesday in November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before strip malls, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my *chutzpah* gets such an upper hand of me that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically scraping bumper stickers off parked pickups—then, I account it high time to hazard moving the Democrats as far to the left as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball.

And so, being anointed X6348A 603020433455 as my “poll code,” I dipped my pen and got straightaway to the DNC’s queries—eager, mind you, to let the Party of Jefferson and Jackson know that there stalks our land such souls as I; namely, men keen to lance the likes of Dick Morris in the hindmost. But where at times the Poll questions were to my satisfaction, I found my *choices* (shall we say) ever less than multiple.

“Sex?” they asked—Wherever possible, I ventured to respond—but lo, only “male” and “female” were availed me.

So on to the next: They ask what I “consider [my] political leanings to be.” I sharpened my pen, set to scratch “*radical!*”—“*social democrat!*”—“*progressive!*” and suchlike, but found as choices only “*liberal!*”—“*moderate!*”—and “*conservative.*”

At which point it dawned on me the madness of my quest to afford New Democrats their bloody end at the point of my quill. For, considering myself friend of the Common Man, in this time of monstrous neglect visited upon him, the only responses I deemed conscionable were revealed as beyond the very imaginings of such poll-addled scurveys as those who crowd the Democrats’ damnable counting houses.

Here, to take another example, is Section V, *Crime And Violence*. “Do you favor or oppose”—ask they—“Republican efforts to eliminate the 100,000 new police positions funded under the President’s 1994 crime bill?” And: “Do you favor or oppose the current ban on the manufacture and sale of semi-automatic assault weapons?”

Now, I favor Law and Order as much as the next fellow, when occasion and justice warrants it (such as where I read in the *New York Times* latterly that a joint stock company of the name “Timken” had lowered its municipal tax payments from \$4.5 million to \$1.5 million within one decade by threat of relocation; while at the same time the impoverished local school district seeks increased levies from citizens). But these questions are so Manichean, that the Democratic sachems seem to me strictly in search of, not the honest opinions of their Partymen, but merely what is commonly called a “Wedge Issue,” by

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